

HISTORY OF
POLITICAL THOUGHT
IN GERMANY
FROM 1789 TO 1815

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by

REINHOLD ARIS

With a Foreword by

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TO
NORA

FOREWORD

THE Augustan age of German literature is known, at least in its main outlines, to well-educated people all over the world. But how many of us are aware that the same wonderful period witnessed the first and greatest flowering of German political thought? How many people think of Kant except as a philosopher, of Goethe except as a poet and dramatist, of the Romantic Movement except as an episode in the evolution of European literature? In this admirable volume, so learned, thoughtful, and clear, Dr. Aris has explored what to most readers is almost unknown ground. No comprehensive and satisfactory survey of the development of German political ideas exists in any language, and the most celebrated monographs, such as those of Meinecke, remain untranslated. It is the merit of the present work to offer a critical analysis of successive or competing schools of thought in the light of the latest scholarship. He has his preferences, like the rest of us, but he allows every writer to speak for himself. The book gives us more than the title suggests, for he deals with men who for the most part were not professional publicists. It is in essence the story of a great nation awaking from a long sleep, commencing to think for itself, to modernize its institutions, to formulate its ideas of the pattern of society and the duties of the State. Modern German literature begins with Klopstock and Lessing. German political thinking comes even later, for it is the child of the French Revolution.

Political systems and ideas must be studied in their setting, as the actor must be seen in the middle of the stage. Dr. Aris is as much at home in the political and social as in the intellectual history of the time. Beginning with the *Aufklärung*—adventurous and effective enough except in the political field—we are introduced in Part One to Kant, the first great German Liberal; to Fichte in his radical and socialist youth; to Humboldt, the champion of individualism in what Herder

called the *terra obedientiae*; to Wieland, Goethe, and Schiller. In Part Two we enter the Romantic world, so strangely different from the rationalism and classicism of the eighteenth century, so richly coloured, so undisciplined and emotional, but occasionally so profound. What Burke, with his doctrine of the organic nature of society, meant to Germany in these years of travail, when familiar landmarks had been swept away by the revolutionary flood, may be read in these illuminating chapters. The Romantic Movement, with its roots in Justus Möser and Herder, its craving for authority and its leaning to Rome, is a subject of inexhaustible interest, for it carries us far beyond the frontiers of literature. Gentz and Görres were born publicists. Novalis, the most original of them all, was a mystic.

If the first two sections are dominated by the French Revolution, Part Three is overshadowed by Napoleon. Fichte the Jacobin returns to the footlights as Fichte the Nationalist; the lessons of Jena are taken to heart; Stein, the strongest political figure of Germany after Bismarck and Frederick the Great, and a more attractive human being than either, summons Prussia to the dual task of national independence and internal reform. Though not a political thinker in the technical sense, he was a political influence of the first rank. Standing midway between the outworn feudalism of the pre-Revolution era and the democracy of which only a few of his bolder countrymen dared to dream, Stein's Liberal Conservatism met the most urgent needs of the day. Had his lead been followed, the drab sterility of the Metternich era would have been avoided. The restoration era, however, and Hegel, its High Priest, are reserved for the next instalment of the ambitious enterprise, so auspiciously begun in these pages, which the author hopes to carry through to the coming of the World War in 1914.

G. P. GOOCH

P R E F A C E

I WISH to express my deep gratitude to the Leon Bequest Committee of the University of London whose generosity enabled me to write this book.

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I am further indebted to several friends who by reading the typescript and the proofs have greatly assisted me in giving the book its present form.

R. A.

HAMPSTEAD

June 1936

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INTRODUCTION

THE most noble aim of the historian is to contribute to the better understanding of his own time. This is the ultimate goal which the great historians had in view when they set out to penetrate into the darkness from whence the present landscape of history emerges. The historian who endeavours to describe the development of political thought must be guided by the same principle. He must try to discover what the people thought about the political issues of the time in order to understand those ideas which are at work at present. This undertaking, however, involves from the start several difficulties. Who were the people whose thought he is going to record? It is obvious that the object of his investigations cannot be the inchoate mass of political thought which we call public opinion. Any such attempt must fail since the sources are either lacking or are too vague and inarticulate. We should like, for instance, to know in what way the peasant in his village, the tradesman in his shop and the nobleman in his mansion talked about the French Revolution, what they thought of the policy of their Governments and how they reacted to political events. Yet clearly this cannot be the subject of our study, even if the sources were more explicit than they actually are. The history of political thought is the history of such thought as actually influenced political events, or was at least expressive of prevailing political tendencies. It need hardly be said that this is not synonymous with the study of political philosophy. It might well be and, indeed, has often been the case that the ideas of political philosophers were doomed to failure or insignificance since they were too far ahead of their times or tried to justify a state of affairs the economic and social presuppositions of which had disappeared. In Germany the number of such thinkers is particularly great, a fact which in itself throws light on its political development.

Thus the historian of political thought in Germany would

commit a fatal mistake if he were to confine himself to the mere relation of the philosophic theories of the State, that is to say, of those theories which treated political questions in a systematic and original way. He would commit the same mistake as he who in describing a mountainous landscape would confine himself to the description of the peaks. Instead he will have to analyse the political ideas of many who made no outstanding contribution to the record of political thought but who were nevertheless characteristic exponents of the prevailing political tendencies. He will have to lay particular stress on the close connection between political and general philosophic ideas, a connection which appears to have been particularly intimate in the period with which this study deals. There are few periods in the history of human thought in which there were so many philosophic thinkers of the first rank, though they excelled more in the field of ethics and of the theory of knowledge than in that of political philosophy proper.

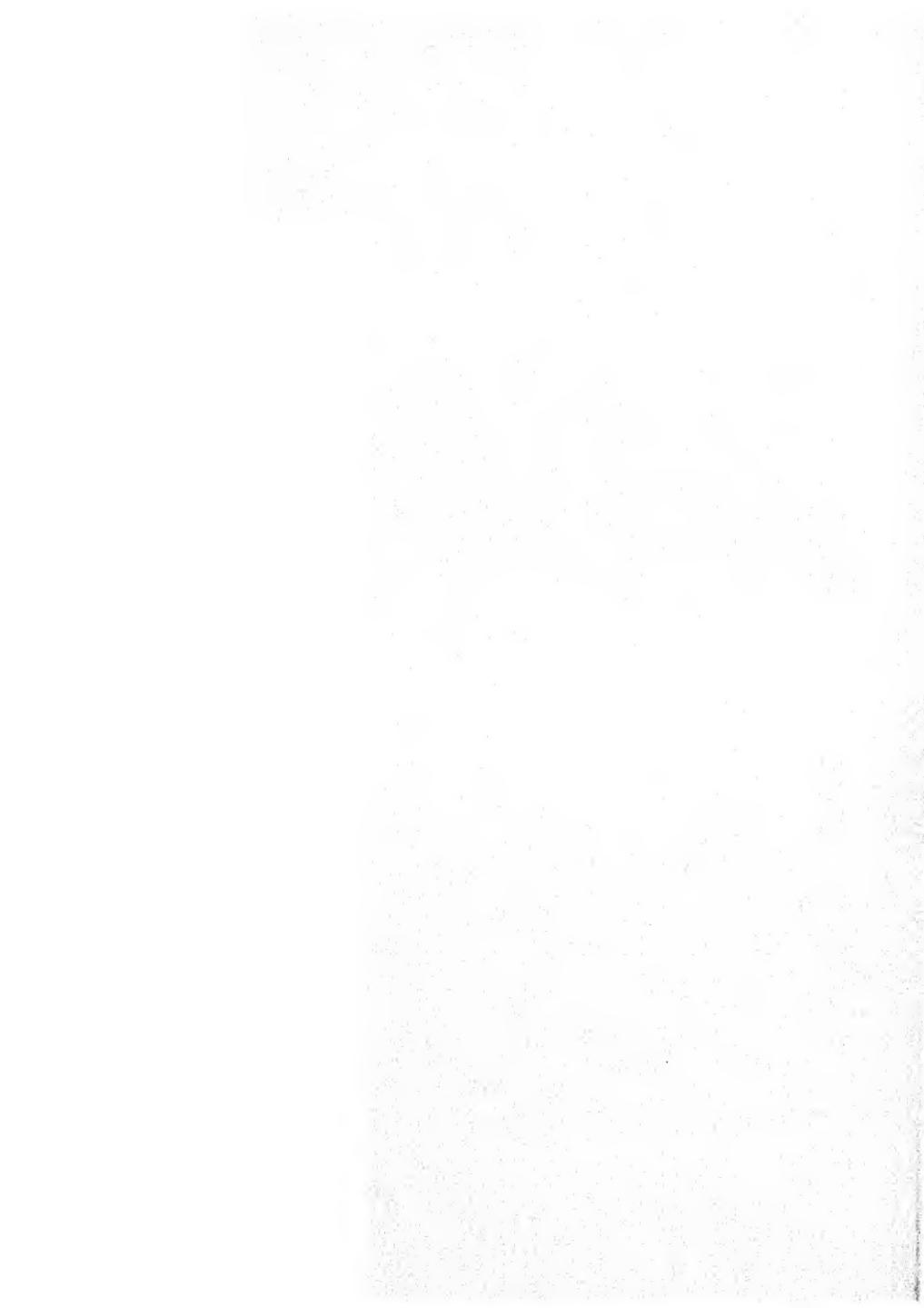
The nineteenth century in Germany started in a historic sense in 1789, for the social movement which determined the direction of the political forces of the century originated in the French Revolution. Every single political thinker of the nineteenth century had to define his attitude towards the revolutionary ideas and the whole history of the German political parties is inextricably bound up with the effects which these ideas had on their leaders.

The years between the outbreak of the Revolution and the downfall of Napoleon were a period of decisive change in every field of social activity. It was the time in which Germany underwent the transformation from feudalism to the modern nation-state, a development which is reflected in the attempts of all political thinkers to redefine the relation between the State and the individual. It is a fascinating task to watch the comparatively rapid emergence of the modern conception of the State, though the paths which the different thinkers took were often tortuous and difficult to follow. The modern con-

ception of the State is one of the most striking results which the rise of the middle classes effected in political thought; in Germany it emerged particularly late and only after many relapses, since Germany's social order lacked the element of a resolute and conscious middle class. The bourgeoisie in England and in France had found their advocates long before Kant pleaded the case of constitutional government.

It was in these years that Germany undertook the immense task of reorganising State and society along the lines which had been elaborated by thinkers such as Locke and Adam Smith, Voltaire and Rousseau. In a quarter of a century all the foundations were laid upon which the edifice of the German Empire was to be built and the social and economic reconstruction took place which is reflected in the thought of Kant, Fichte and Hegel. In 1789 Germany consisted of three hundred independent states, in 1818 the Prussian customs reform was effected which was the first decisive step towards political unity. A few years before the Revolution Möser, one of the representative political thinkers of the time, devoted himself to a study of the history of one of the small German principalities; shortly after the Napoleonic wars Hegel elaborated his philosophic system which hailed the Prussian militarist state as the incarnation of the world-spirit.

This study does not deal with Hegel, though some of his works appeared before 1815. But Hegel belongs essentially to the period of reaction and restoration which set in with the Congress of Vienna so that he must find his place in a study which describes the development of German political thought after 1815.



PART I

ENLIGHTENMENT AND REVOLUTION

CHAPTER I

GERMANY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

WHILE the foundations of the European social system were being shattered under the impact of the French Revolution and a new era in political thought was dawning in Europe, in Germany that powerful movement had just set in which was to be called the Augustan Age of German culture. The reign of Frederick the Great had ended a few years before the inspiring news of the storming of the Bastille reached Germany. It was the time when Goethe was at the height of his production and the philosophy of Kant had begun to change the entire philosophic and scientific outlook.

Everyone who has concerned himself with this productive period knows the attraction which its study offers, an attraction not unlike that which is found in the early years of a great man, in which his forces are still developing yet in which achievement can already be seen. It was as if Germany had suddenly wakened from a deep sleep and had endeavoured to make up for lost time, working with immense and accumulated energy. In two generations she built up in the sphere of poetry and science what other nations had achieved in the long course of fruitful centuries. This feverish overstraining of production resulted in a superabundance from which morbid characteristics are not wholly absent. Never perhaps since the heyday of Greece has there been such a galaxy of thinkers and poets concentrated in one epoch, beside whom those who in other times would have been valued as the leaders of the nation pale into insignificance.

The political thought of Germany throughout the eighteenth century was based almost exclusively on French and English sources and it took Germany a long time to digest this alien system of ideas and adapt it to the specific German political situation. Germany still thought entirely in the terms of a

rational Natural Law, whereas in France and England the foundations of this idea of Natural Law had been effectively undermined. In so far as Germany had taken over foreign political ideas at all, they remained until the outbreak of the French Revolution a plant which had grown up on foreign soil and could not thrive in the different environment.

The reasons for Germany's failure to develop a political theory of her own which would suit her difficult political situation are essentially the same as those which had crippled her whole intellectual life for centuries. A rich and vigorous intellectual and social development had reached its climax in the Reformation and had then been interrupted by a series of religious wars the most disastrous of which was the Thirty Years War.

It cannot, of course, be maintained that this fatal war was the origin or even the main cause of the subsequent decay of Germany. The war was itself only the outcome of Germany's geographical and religious division into a number of independent states waging war with one another. For every German it is a sad thought that whereas England under the influence of the spiritual movement emanating from the Reformation could powerfully develop her social and political life, Germany, the land of the Reformation, continuously degenerated.

It is almost a commonplace to point out that only nations with a rich political life are able to produce political ideas. Only a country like England, where an independent middle class had sprung up, or more correctly speaking, where there has never been such a rigid division of classes as on the continent, could produce a phenomenon like Parliament and the thinkers who outlined its functions. Only a country like France, in which monarchical power had become the centre of the State before it decayed, could carry through a revolution with such far-reaching consequences. The monarchy in France by destroying the feudal system destroyed at the same time the foundations of the traditional social order. By doing so it made

itself as it were superfluous; it stimulated criticism and thus undermined the established organisation of society. In Germany the concentration of political power in the member states had finally disrupted the structure of the Empire.

It has often been asked why the movement of 1789 did not extend itself over the German frontiers and lead to a revolution also in Germany. It has been suggested that the national character of the Germans did not permit such a revolution to take place, and this seems to be supported by the fact that there has never been a thoroughgoing revolution in Germany. This explanation, however, leaves open the question as to what conditions had formed the German character in this particular way. In reality a revolution in Germany could not take place because the necessary social conditions were lacking. A revolution is always the translation into action of an economic and social situation as the objective material and of a political will as the subjective driving force. It is by no means necessary that the political will shall have acquired a very definite theoretical form. Always, however, there must exist some guiding principles which are widely acknowledged and under whose impression the masses act or can at least be induced to follow revolutionary leaders.

Now the economic conditions, above all the situation of the lower classes, were, at least in many parts of the Empire, very similar to the conditions in France. The "objective situation" therefore was given, even if as G. Forster wrote in July 1791, "poverty, abuse, oppression and exhaustion had not reached the highest point as in the neighbouring country." We are not concerned here with the validity of Forster's view, or if it is not on the contrary true that revolutions never take place when the masses have touched the deepest point in their misery. In fact, the economic position of the peasants in France was on the whole considerably better than that of their German neighbours. The old feudal services had been largely commuted into dues to be paid in money and in many parts an

independent class of yeomen had sprung up.¹ Travellers like Young and Jefferson noticed an increasing prosperity, though in other districts the situation was bad enough.²

The question of the economic position of the peasants can be left undecided here as it was not the peasantry but the people in the towns who determined the fate of the French Revolution. The peasants were at any rate still so dissatisfied that they assisted the revolutionary movement in order to get rid of the last remnants of the feudal order. The decisive point is that the economic problems in France were general French problems whereas in Germany the suffering masses had no feeling of common suffering. As Trotsky says in the preface to his *History of the Russian Revolution*: "The masses go into a revolution not with a prepared plan of social reconstruction, but with a sharp feeling that they cannot endure the old régime."

This "sharp feeling" certainly existed in Germany in single individuals and in some districts, but the people as a whole lacked any decisive driving force, any passionate will to resist the evil. They did not even know the fate of their fellow-countrymen in distant districts since there were practically no means of communicating information. They were apathetic and indifferent.³

In order to realise what crippling influence the political absolutism exerted on the social life of Germany we have to think of the two most famous crowned representatives of benevolent despotism, of Frederick II and Joseph II.

Frederick had written a book against Machiavelli and called

¹ Kulischer, *Allgemeine Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, vol. ii, p. 73 ff. Cf. also Göhring, *Die Frage der Feudalität am Ende des Ancien Régime*, p. 58.

² Wahl, *Studien zur Vorgeschichte der französischen Revolution*, p. 97. Cf. also de Tocqueville, *L'Ancien régime*, book 2, ch. 1.

³ "An impoverished nobility," Häusser writes, "who sought their existence in the service of the new lords, a middle class without independent trade and industry; altogether a people which was degenerated by poverty and was partly educated, partly forced, to passive obedience and subjection—these were not the elements that were able to erect a barrier against the rising absolutism of the time." Häusser, *Deutsche Geschichte*, p. 5.

himself the first servant of the State, but he was very far from acknowledging the State as his master in practice or even from granting the people rights of control over his government. His government was in its aims enlightened, in its methods autocratic. The people, even the upper class, were entirely excluded from a share in the government and the formation of the political will. The powerful will of the king interfered arbitrarily with all departments of social life and trade and commerce ran along lines which the king's opinion of the public welfare had determined. His motto, admired even by Kant, was: "Grumble as much as you like but obey."

The era of Enlightenment saw its ideal in Frederick and nobody dreamed of vindicating the rights of the people against the benevolent ruler. It cannot be denied, however, that the far-seeing policy of the king had contributed much to healing the wounds which had been inflicted on the country in the recent wars. When Frederick died the finances of Prussia were in excellent order, much had been done to improve trade and industry and the king himself was the first modern national hero of the Germans. The members of the feudal nobility whom the king and his predecessors had brought to serve the State and to give up most of their feudal prerogatives were bound to his service because they enjoyed privileges in the military and governmental service. The middle classes profited from his attempts to increase trade and industry in Prussia and the professional classes worshipped him as the philosophic king who stood for progress and tolerance. Thus absolutism in one of the greatest German states cannot be compared with the absolutism of the Bourbons. It was the best example of enlightened rule and on the whole most favourable to economic progress.

Frederick's government of tutelage and centralisation, however, had contributed nothing towards the effective political education of his subjects. It must be added that the king had no high opinion of the cultural possibilities of Germany and did not conceal this conviction. His outspoken preference

for French, which the wrore better than his own language, was certainly not calculated to raise the national self-confidence of his subjects. As is well known, many important branches of the administration were in the hands of foreign, especially French, officials. His subjects were used to identify the king with the State and unable to develop a national conception of the State as a social organisation.

It was partly due to the king's preference for French civilisation, a preference which was shared by the upper classes, that the cultural centres of Germany were for a long time outside Prussia, in Leipzig, where Gottsched began to reform German literature, in Hamburg, where Klopstock and Lessing worked and in Weimar where Schiller and Goethe, Wieland and Herder, ruled like gods. The rôle of Berlin as an intellectual centre was modest till after 1800; it was governed by the shallow prophet of enlightenment, Nicolai, and held in contempt by the Olympians who, like Goethe, hardly deigned to visit it.

The type of the benevolent despot can further be exemplified by Joseph II. Inspired by the best intentions, he believed himself able to administer his Empire like a master who cares personally for all the grievances of his servants and moulds their fate through continuous encroachments upon their affairs. Joseph had an unshakable belief in reason, above all in the reasonableness of his own convictions and he endeavoured therefore to usurp the entire government. No wonder that the vast mechanism of his Empire suffered seriously and that the result was disorder and inefficiency. Law was superseded by law, decree by decree,¹ and although there were good starts, his work foundered pitifully and gave place even during his life to a dark reaction. An irreparable damage had been done, because his subjects had unlearned completely, or perhaps had never learned, to think about political affairs in an independent manner. They had been trained to wait for what was

¹ At the end of ten years' reign, there were six thousand decrees and over eleven thousand new laws. Padower, *The Revolutionary Emperor*, p. 186.

given to them from above and they were unable to define their attitude towards political problems, much less to take them in hand themselves. In fact, a government such as that of Joseph II was nothing but unbridled despotism.¹ Thus the political writers who appeared under Frederick and Joseph, as for example, the converted Jew Sonnenfels in Vienna, were by no means representatives of the people, or advocates of their rights, but at best popular philosophers who tried to justify the measures of the Government and to prove that they were in accordance with the idea of the continuous progress of mankind. Later liberal writers have tried to idealise Joseph II and to turn him into a precursor of nineteenth-century liberalism. Nothing could be further from the truth. It must not be forgotten that both Frederick and Joseph despised the people and had not the slightest use for democratic ideas. By centralising the government they did much to build up the modern conception of the State, but they did nothing to make their subjects identify themselves with the State.

In the numerous small states of Germany it was not otherwise and was often worse. And in those amongst them where wise and honest princes governed, as in Baden, Saxe-Gotha and Weimar, the citizens were no more accustomed to take their political affairs in hand themselves, or even to concern themselves with them. In the numerous states which were badly governed by tyrannical and extravagant princes, the subjects were at best only capable of uttering useless protests and their political life bore the stamp of impotence.

It is therefore little wonder that Germany in the eighteenth century had not produced political ideas of any importance up to the time of the French Revolution. The masses of the population struggled through a miserable existence interested

¹ This was recognised by Kant, when he wrote "A government that is based on the principle of benevolence towards the people, as of a father towards his children, is a paternal government (*imperium paternale*), where accordingly the subjects are minors, who cannot distinguish what is really useful or detrimental to them, and are forced to maintain a passive attitude —such government is the greatest despotism." *Metaphysik der Sitten*, § 49.

only in finding the means for their livelihood, while the upper classes, so far as they were interested in politics at all, took absolutism for granted, and in their slavish imitation of French culture did not realise that there were typically German problems to be solved. How could the Holy Roman Empire, which Pufendorf had already called a political monster and which in 1806 was to collapse like a house of cards before the breath of Napoleon, be the appropriate ground for political activity? A national consciousness did not exist in an Empire whose princes sold their subjects as soldiers to foreign powers in order to maintain their mistresses, where every prince was only intent on guarding his own interests and where even the enlightened rulers prevented their subjects from taking any part in political affairs. Even the League of Princes inaugurated by Frederick the Great, the first intimation of German unification, had only been created for the purpose of preventing Austrian predominance. The emperor and the Imperial Diet, the imperial court and army, stood like tombstones on a cemetery, as Perthes gloomily remarks.¹ The Imperial Diet in Regensburg had degenerated into a permanent congress of ambassadors, and offered a deplorable spectacle. It was a musty museum piece, of more antiquarian than political value, a queer remnant from mediaeval times. When one reads that in Regensburg they discussed for days which ambassadors were allowed to sit on green chairs and which on red, one is reminded of the scholastic controversy as to how many angels could find room on the point of a needle. The mediaeval Church, however, in spite of these subtleties, had never lost sight of political reality and its important issues, whereas this

¹ One utterance of Rebmann's is highly characteristic of the prevailing attitude towards the Holy Roman Empire. Rebmann was prosecuted by the Elector of Mainz on account of some of his publications which were considered to be subversive. He escaped and the Government issued a warrant against him in which amongst other things he was charged with having derided the Empire. Rebmann defended himself in a pamphlet in which he wrote: "It is only from this warrant that we learn to the greatest surprise of mankind that there exists such a thing as a constitution in the Empire." Wrasky, *Rebmann*, p. 67.

Imperial Diet was nothing but an almost powerless spectre. What the imperial judicature was like Goethe describes vividly in his autobiography. Thus the Empire was an object of derision and contempt amongst the intelligent citizens of the German states and political interest was directed to the small local principalities, where it could find no adequate scope. Even in the larger states, as in Prussia, political activity expressed itself at most only in attacks on the foreign officials or in more or less harmless invectives against the king, who was, nevertheless, considered the only guarantor of the lower classes against the landed nobility.

The questions which most occupied political minds in Germany throughout the eighteenth century were the mal-administration of the princes and the nobles, and the economic position of the peasants. Whereas in France and England the monarchy had destroyed the power of the feudal system comparatively early, in Germany the central imperial power had retreated inch by inch before its opponents. Since the disaster of the Thirty Years War Germany had been split up into hundreds of small absolute states which were independent of the central Government and in most of which the feudal system persisted for centuries. The Palatinate, for instance, comprising only 105 square miles, was divided into 44 independent states. In this respect it is noteworthy that in two states, the two Mecklenburgs, it was not until 1918 that the feudal system was finally destroyed by the socialist revolution.

Especially ill-behaved were some ecclesiastical princes and some imperial knights who exploited their territories of a few square miles in the most ruthless way.¹ If absolutism was hated in Germany it was largely on account of these small states which imitated the French example most faithfully. The margrave Karl Friedrich Wilhelm von Ansbach is said

¹ That the ecclesiastical states were ripe for a reform was widely realised. In 1785 the editor of the *Journal für und von Deutschland* offered a prize for the best paper on the defects of the ecclesiastical states. In 1787, F. K. v. Moser published a book on the government of the ecclesiastical states in Germany which was highly critical.

to have shot a chimney sweeper down from the roof of a building to amuse his mistress and to have paid off the widow with a few thalers.¹ It has been mentioned that several princes sold their subjects as soldiers to foreign powers. It is significant of the prevailing political attitude that on the whole little attention was given to this, since it was usual to consider the prince the personal owner of his territory and his subjects. Even Schloezer, that upright fighter against tyranny, points out in one number of his periodical that out of the Germans who had been sold "only" 11,853 had failed to return home.

The central imperial power was helpless in face of such outrages or was but seldom willing to interfere. Only in particularly revolting cases, and when the evil-doer was one of the smaller princes, does the emperor appear to have taken measures. Thus in 1770 an imperial decree was issued against the Count von Leiningen Güntersblum for "shocking sacrilege, attempted manslaughter, poisoning, bigamy, *lèse majesté*, ill-treatment of his subjects and illicit mishandling of foreign and ecclesiastical persons."²

Apart from the princes the nobles were the main cause of political trouble. According to the feudal organisation which was still in full force in many parts of the Empire the noble lord of the manor had almost unlimited power over his peasants. Often enough he exercised this power ruthlessly. A special nuisance was the passion of the lords for hunting in which they disregarded all economic interests of the peasants.³

¹ Kaufmann, *Geschichte Deutschlands im XIX Jahrhundert*, p. 9.

² Kaufmann, *ibid.*, p. 5.

³ Significant of the frame of mind in which these unfortunate people were is a poem written by Bürger in 1773 which was published in one of the periodicals of the time:

Die Saat, so Deine Jagd zertritt,
Was Ross und Hund und Du verschlingst,
Das Brot, Du Fürst, ist mein.
Ha, Du wärest Obrigkeit von Gott!
Gott spendet Segen aus! Du raubst,
Du nicht von Gott, Tyrann.

—Wenck, *Deutschland vor 100 Jahren*, vol. i, p. 14. Bürger, *Werke*, Berlin, Weichert, vol. i, p. 128.

Even the sensible rulers such as the Elector of Saxony indulged their passion for hunting to such a degree that it repeatedly caused riots of peasants. It is well known that Goethe had to condemn this passion in Karl August of Saxe-Weimar, who was one of the best rulers of the age.

If there had been in Germany anything like coherent political thought or a body of opinion which could be influenced by thought, it would have found an outlet in a revolution against the tyranny of the princes and the nobles. J. L. Ewald, who was then much read, says in his pamphlet "*What are the nobles to do?*" "If there is a revolution in Germany it will be directed chiefly against the nobles."¹

It must be kept in mind that of a population of 24 to 30 millions about two-thirds were occupied in agriculture.² Only a quarter of the population lived in towns and there was no sharp division between country and town dwellers because most of the townspeople also had land which they tilled like peasants. On the other hand, many of the poorest peasants in some districts worked in domestic industry. A class of workmen in the modern sense did not exist since the artisans seldom employed more than one or two journeymen.

The towns themselves were often by no means towns in the modern sense; they were in fact large villages with special charters. Even in 1800 there were only three towns in Prussia with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Berlin had 100,000 inhabitants at a time when there were 700,000 in London. After the immense development of the German towns in the later Middle Ages it was the towns in particular which decayed and many were conspicuous for their serious maladministration. In many of them a rule of patricians had developed and the inhabitants exhausted their energy in the continuous struggles of the ruling class with the corporations of the townspeople. A good example of this development is Cologne where the members of the Council dodged the prescribed democratic election by proclaiming themselves elected again and again.

¹ Wenck, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 60. ² This was to change only after 1850.

Instead of an absolute prince the people had to face an absolute oligarchy.

The guild organisation to which men like Möser still clung with determination crippled economic progress because it had degenerated into an institution the chief aim of which seemed to consist in excluding as long as possible the talents of the younger generation. It is true that the absolute rulers under the influence of the mercantile theory had tried to favour industry and trade, but the results were not very encouraging. The political disunity of Germany, the general insecurity, the hopeless condition of the roads frustrated all attempts at successful reforms. As far as there was industry at all it was subject to petty limitations on the part of the Government. The methods of production were strictly prescribed, public inspectors exercised a control which was very often unwise.¹ The innumerable custom barriers, the difference in the systems of coinage crippled the economic development and prevented Germany from exploiting its natural resources. Trade was in a bad state with only a few exceptions such as in towns like Hamburg and Bremen which profited from the decline of the Dutch trade after 1651.² Hamburg was therefore one of the few towns where the middle class was active, intelligent and broad-minded and where opportunities were offered to men like Lessing and Klopstock. Hamburg was also particularly open to the ideas of the French Revolution and continued to trade with France even at a time when the town was officially an ally in the war against the Revolution.

The administration everywhere was in a state of hopeless over-organisation in which personal vanity and ambition had free rein. In Bavaria, for instance, out of $7\frac{1}{2}$ million thalers collected in taxation in one year two millions were devoured

¹ Hobson, *The Evolution of Modern Capitalism*, p. 98.

² Cf. Heinrich Cunow, *Allgemeine Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, iv, p. 38 ff., 50. In Hamburg ships arrived from North America under the Hamburg flag:

1791	35	1794	91	1797	71
1792	37	1795	77	1798	122
1793	33	1796	110	1799	192

by the collection itself. Twelve generals and the court war council with two presidents and six councillors were considered necessary to be at the head of an "army" of one of the ecclesiastical states consisting of 2,800 infantry, 50 hussars and 120 artillery. Questions of etiquette were of the highest importance as is shown by the fact that the Elector of Cologne and the Pope engaged in a bitter dispute which lasted for years as to whether the papal legate was allowed to keep on his black cap at his audiences.

It is beside the point to decide here whether the peasants in those parts where the feudal organisation was still in full force were living in slavery or only in serfdom. They were only saved from the name of slave by their legal ability to amass a moderate fortune of their own and to bequeath it and because they were unfree only in relation to their masters and not to other persons, whereas the slave in the legal sense is absolutely unfree, and can only be the object but never the subject of rights. The only relevant point is that they were entirely dependent on their masters who had jurisdiction over them. They were not allowed to leave the estate but were sold along with it and it matters little that they could not legally be sold separately. If they tried to escape the dreadful drudgery they were reclaimed by their masters like chattels. Their daughters could only marry with the permission of the master, the children had to serve with the family of the lord as soon as they were physically capable of doing so. The conditions under which they had to work are illustrated by the fact that a maid in some cases received three thalers as a year's salary, out of which she had to provide two pairs of shoes which cost her two thalers.¹

The peasant was indeed in the unhappy position of being a cross between a beast of burden and a human being who was imbued with a dumb hatred of his oppressor. He was regarded in the first place as an object of exploitation as the following

¹ Knapp, G., *Die Bauernbefreiung und der Ursprung der Landarbeiter*, pp. 28 ff., 67.

quotation taken from Hoefdinger shows: "The peasant is like a flour sack which even if it is emptied still gives out dust if you shake it sufficiently."¹ His education was negligible. The school posts were in the hands of the landowners who bestowed them as often as not as sinecures on their favourites who sometimes could not read or write themselves. The teachers were pitifully paid and had very often to earn their living as vergers or tailors. Throughout Prussia there were, in about 1800, only two hundred teachers who earned more than a hundred thalers per annum.²

Naturally it was not as bad everywhere as these facts seem to indicate. They apply in the first place to the east of Germany. The Elbe was the boundary in this respect. To the west of this river large estates had developed hardly anywhere, whereas to the east of it, where the Slavs had been subjected, huge estates had grown up. The result was that, in the west of Germany a class of independent farmers had grown up or, as in Westphalia, had survived, whereas in the east agriculture was carried on first by serfs and later by hired labourers. In some parts of the west, however, as in Bavaria and the Palatinate, the situation was also bad enough. The Bishop of Speyer, one of the staunchest representatives of the old régime, for instance, was shortly before the outbreak of the Revolution fined by the Reichskammergericht because he ill-treated his peasants.³

Rulers such as Frederick and Joseph very soon attempted to put an end to the grossest abuses.⁴ It is, however, very interesting to notice that even a prince like Frederick did not succeed in realising his schemes in face of the opposition of the landowners who obstructed all his attempts for a long time. In Prussia it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century

¹ Heigel, *Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. i, p. 106.

² Knapp, loc. cit., p. 77; Heigel, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 69.

³ Cf. Hansen, *Quellen*, vol. i, p. 414.

⁴ Frederick the Great wrote: "My intention is, that the peasants shall be free people not slaves." Kulischer, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 96.

that the liberation of the peasants could be finally carried through.¹

Even in the parts where the economic position of the peasants was better they were to a large extent economically in the hands of their lords. It is obvious that a class like this accustomed as it was to "fidelity, reverence and obedience" could not develop any civic spirit. Their opposition found expression chiefly in constant efforts to evade as far as possible the duties required of them. They developed the mentality of the beaten dog which they had acquired through generations of servitude and were less inclined to resistance than their French neighbours. It is well known that one of the reasons which led to the revolution in France was that the French peasants were no longer actually governed by their feudal lords on whom they were economically dependent.² The German peasants, therefore, were more willing to bear their economic burden since they received at least that protection which even the worst government accords. Whereas in England a class of independent minded farmers had come into existence as early as the sixteenth century, and in France many peasants had attained freedom and independence and the *tiers état* had begun to show a decided self-confidence, there was no political life amongst the German peasants. Moreover there was apart from the intellectuals no middle class which might have become the vehicle of new political ideas.

By middle class we understand that stratum of society which possessed means of production only on a small scale or not at all, but was, nevertheless, not entirely dependent on the will of others, nor forced to sell its labour to the highest bidder. To this group belong the shopkeepers, the independent peasants, the members of the civil service, the small merchants and manufacturers, the members of the learned professions and the artisans. Such a middle class had grown up since the

¹ Cf. Kulischer, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 436.

² The only district in which a serious counter-revolutionary movement sprung up was the Vendée where feudalism was still at its height, but where the noblemen were resident.

sixteenth century only in the towns which played too small a part in the life of the nation to attain any importance. Here, too, England and France had a long start, inasmuch as they had very soon developed large cities which moulded the social and political life of the nation. As far as the better artisans and civil servants composed a middle class, such a class had not yet awakened in Germany to a consciousness of its position in society. We shall see how little the great poets of the time felt themselves as "Bürger." It is typical that, in 1783, a highly placed official could be beaten by a nobleman in the open street in Stuttgart and that no proceedings were taken against the aggressor.

The section of the population which was responsible for such political thinking as existed was the comparatively small class of professional writers whose number has been estimated at 6,200 in about 1789.¹ These men found a field for their activities in the numerous periodicals which, following the English example, appeared like mushrooms in Germany. Karzynsky counts for the years 1780-1790 alone 114 of such periodicals. They were on the whole more important than the newspapers which till after 1800 were little more than bare news sheets whose editors carefully avoided committing themselves to any definite political attitude and which, strongly censured as they were, could not utter political opinions, even if they had any.² The majority of the people who represented the political thought of the time were professors, parsons, officials and the sons of these people. Only a few, like Fichte, had risen from the lowest ranks of society and it is certainly no accident that it was Fichte who was one of the most passionate spokesmen of the national idea in Germany and at the same time clung most determinedly to the social ideas of the Revolution. Fundamentally this class of intellectuals, like

¹ Randel, *Annalen der Staatskräfte von Europa*, part I, p. 17.

² One example is sufficient to illustrate the effects of censorship. Goecking was forced by the Prussian Government to give up the *Journal für und von Deutschland* because he had criticised the Government of Mainz for not having repaired a church tower. *Historisches Jahrbuch*, vol. 54, p. 5.

the entire middle class, was until the outbreak of the Revolution uninterested in political questions. Having grown up under the influence of the Enlightenment, even if they protested against the excesses of absolutism, they were more interested in general human problems than in national or social ones. They believed for a long time that it was the task of enlightened princes to further the progress of mankind by providing for the happiness of their peoples. On the whole the Enlightenment was favourable to political thinking since as Dilthey writes: "the eighteenth century lived in the belief that it was possible to reduce the complicated human life to clear and generally valid concepts and to win from these just as simple and regular maxims for practical behaviour."¹ But when the thinkers found out that political reality could not be reduced to some simple principles they retreated from politics in disappointment and despair.

The French Revolution therefore found a strange echo in Germany. One can distinguish three main sections which reacted to it in quite different ways.²

There was first the section of the princes and noblemen, the class which really governed. For them the Revolution meant the destruction of all the privileges on which their economic and social prerogatives were based. They saw in it, rightly, a dangerous attack against the system of absolutism. Especially after the execution of Louis XVI they feared that their own subjects would draw unpleasant conclusions from the revolutionary example. In some of them, moreover, as in Frederick William II of Prussia, a genuine religious feeling had been violated by the outrages of the revolutionaries. This group, therefore, with a few exceptions which we shall have to consider, was hostile to the Revolution from the beginning. With it was the great mass of the adventurers, servants and officials

¹ Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. iii, p. 252.

² For the whole of this chapter I am greatly indebted to Dr. Gooch's book *Germany and the French Revolution*, and to Hansen's admirable compilation of sources which furnish the historian with a first-hand knowledge which he otherwise could only get after years of laborious research.

who were in its pay.¹ There were, however, a number of high officials who had been in the service of benevolent despots who regarded the Revolution favourably. Hertzberg, the able minister of Frederick the Great, defended the Revolution and its principles in public lectures and incurred Burke's criticism for so doing.²

Some members of this group were not unfavourable towards the Revolution as long as they believed that it would weaken the political power of France. They turned fiercely against it when they realised that it actually increased the national strength of the Republic. One of the ironies of history lies in the fact that nothing contributed more to furthering the Revolution and the breakdown of absolutism than the policy of war against the Revolution which was favoured by the Prussian king. The notorious Brunswick Manifesto was the death-warrant which absolutism issued against itself, even if it is not true that it was this manifesto which caused the death of the French king.³ In many ways the attitude of the ruling class to the Revolution can be compared with that of many people to Soviet Russia in our own day. They were afraid that the Revolution had the aim "of annihilating all religions and good customs and of undermining and destroying the governments, laws and good order of all empires and states of Europe."⁴

How the large stratum of the peasants reacted to the Revolution and what its general political attitude was cannot easily be ascertained. This class naturally was not very articulate, and we have no *cahiers* to tell us about their grievances and ideas of reform. But the very fact that it was so inarticulate admits of a conclusion *a posteriori* as to its political point of view. It was too apathetic to be moved to action by the ideals

¹ Biedermann estimates that there were twice as many officials in proportion to the population in the latter eighteenth century as there were a hundred years later, op. cit., p. 100 ff.

² Cf. *Thoughts on French Affairs*, Everyman edition, p. 317.

³ This was realised by many people in Germany at the time. Forster and Herder were furious about the manifesto, and even Goethe made fun of it. Cf. Hansen, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 301.

⁴ Hansen, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 806.

of the Revolution in the same way that it had been unmoved by the ideas of Enlightenment. It can be assumed for certain that the German peasants stirred to the reverberations of the events beyond the Rhine. They certainly heard with satisfaction of the abolition of the prerogatives of the nobility. Undoubtedly there were lively discussions of these events everywhere. In February 1793 the German Reichstag issued an admonition to its subjects that they should not allow themselves to be seduced by dangerous and subversive political theories and above all should abstain from untimely arguments in public-houses and in the streets. Local riots repeatedly occurred.¹ In some districts as in Silesia and in Saxony, where the workers in domestic industry lived for the most part in indescribable misery, there was even bloodshed. In other places the peasants became restless and set upon their overseers. Nowhere, however, did a larger common action develop. The claims put forward by these rebels had but little to do with those of the French revolutionaries.² They contented themselves with demanding the abolition of the most burdensome prerogatives, above all of hunting rights. How insecure the authorities felt is illustrated by the fact that in some cases they paid the rebels compensation out of public funds for the loss which they had suffered through missing their work while taking part in the riots. Further riots took place in Alsace, the Saar Basin and the Rhineland, districts which were naturally the most susceptible to French influence.

In so far, however, as disturbances of the established order occurred they were confined to the districts in question and the rebels had nothing of the enthusiasm which animated the French revolutionaries. The "revolutionaries" in Germany

¹ Cf. Treitschke's *History of Germany in the XIX Century*, vol. i, p. 137.

² It is true that the French masses also concerned themselves in the first place with purely social and not with philosophical problems. Cf. Champion, loc. cit., p. 225. But Mornet in his book on the intellectual origins of the French Revolution has shown that such questions played a part, by no means negligible. Mornet, loc. cit., p. 453.

strode anxiously even while they were raising revolutionary demands to deny any connection with the French events. Thus the inhabitants of Worms protested to the Emperor against their corrupt municipal government as the result of which riots occurred. The burghers, however, asked the priests to testify on their behalf that their claims had nothing to do with a rebellion. Likewise the people of Dortmund declared in a letter of protest that they did not act in blind enthusiasm for liberty. The people of Mainz pronounced in a petition addressed to the French general Custine that "that phlegm, with which Nature had endowed them, would not permit them so much strength as to follow the French."¹ The proceedings sometimes did not lack a certain humour. The inhabitants of Strassburg, who had become very restless and who a few years later experienced a bloody terror, asserted that "they had no bad intentions towards their masters, for they did not want to chop off their heads, as was common in France, but only to pluck out a few feathers."²

Indeed, there was no question of taking over French aims and ideas. The only stratum which could have pushed forward the revolution in Germany, the peasants and the middle classes in the towns, had neither a common leader nor contact with one another. This was clearly recognised by Johannes von Müller, who, like many others, asked himself the question why the French Revolution did not spread also to Germany. "The masses cannot do very much," he wrote, "and unfortunately the provinces are too unknown to each other to do anything in common."³ The masses can only act when they are imbued with a strong revolutionary desire for change and are under the leadership of men who are resolved not to halt at ineffective reforms. The Revolution was victorious in a centralised France where a comparatively small mob in Paris under suitable leadership could carry with it the whole country and where the peasants had already obtained some

¹ Hansen, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, p. 570.

² Heigel, *loc. cit.*, vol. i, p. 218.

³ *Works*, vol. xxxviii, p. 132.

reforms which had whetted their appetite. It was doomed to failure in an economically and politically divided Germany. How important the share of the lower classes was in all revolutionary attempts is shown by a list of the names of the 454 members of the club of Jacobins in Mainz. In this list which, it is true, was published by opponents of the Revolution it was pointed out that the club contained, except for some professors, only the lowest type of people. Frau Reimarus, on the other hand, asserted that all the scholars, professors and men of brains belonged to it. It is significant that the members of the middle class at any rate, as we have seen in their address to Custine, kept aloof.

The third stratum consisted of these scholars, professors and men of brains. Did the people who could have led a revolution exist amongst them? It seems doubtful when one looks more closely at the intellectuals who supported the cause of the revolution in Germany. Some of those who cried the loudest were unfrocked priests like Eulogius Schneider, or even degraded princes like that prince of Hesse who played a pernicious part in the terror in Paris because he had no part to play at home.¹ Eulogius Schneider is an interesting person of the kind that will always be thrown up in troubled times, talented, ambitious and unscrupulous. He was originally a member of the Franciscan Order, but he soon became a rabid adherent of the ideas of Enlightenment and began to preach tolerance. He became the adviser of the Duke of Württemberg in whom he tried to instil the ideas of Enlightenment. Like most intellectuals, Schneider was at first convinced that the chief political task was to win the princes for the ideals of tolerance and moderation. He was an admirer of Joseph II on whose death he wrote an elegy. "To become happy," so he told the prince, "is the final aim of the subject, to make happy the destination of the prince. Enlightenment has reduced the power of the ruler to certain limits and has taught the rulers that they wear their crown for the common welfare only and that their

¹ As to Eulogius Schneider, cf. *Preussische Jahrbücher*, vol. xxviii, p. 50.

true dignity consists in the active furtherance of that welfare."¹ This the Duke of Württemberg might have considered as harmless enthusiasm, but Schneider went on to tell him that all men were equal and that the prince was only the first official of the State and the deputy of the people. The result was that the Duke dismissed Schneider. Nothing is more characteristic of the political attitude of this group of enthusiastic intellectuals than this episode which reveals the *naïveté* of these "political leaders." Schneider was appointed professor in Mainz, but was dismissed from his post in 1791 because he published a book which was supposed to be incompatible with Catholic dogma, and he went to Strassburg where he became a radical Jacobin and functioned as public prosecutor.² As such he was responsible for the death of a great many people until he himself ended on the guillotine. Schneider is one of a group of Catholic intellectuals who had made even Catholic universities, such as Mainz and Bonn, the headquarters of Enlightenment, and who turned revolutionaries when they realised that the princes were not inclined to give up their absolute power.³ It was chiefly on account of their fanatic activities that Enlightenment and Revolution became identical terms, a fact which greatly facilitated the work of the obscurantist reactionaries. Many members of this group were indeed of a very doubtful character, who after having lost the firm ground of their religious faith became completely irresponsible.

From such wood the leaders of a revolution are certainly not hewn. Many inclined towards the French Revolution because they hoped for personal gain from it or because they wanted to satisfy their lust for adventure, not because they believed in its principles. Many other followers of the Revolution were utopian dreamers, idealistic professors, petty journalists or simply unruly spirits who were pushed forward by an obscure yearning. The German professors have seldom

¹ Hansen, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 348.

² There is still much controversy about the part which Schneider played in Strassburg, cf. Venedey, *Die deutschen Republikaner*, p. 39 ff.

³ Cf. Braubach, M., *Historisches Jahrbuch*, vol. xl ix, p. 263 ff.

played a conspicuously glorious part in German politics. They have either bowed unquestioningly to the ruling powers or have been too strongly under the influence of utopian dogmas. This was already recognised by the anonymous author of a pamphlet entitled *Philosophical Remarks on Republics* which appeared in 1790. The author points out that nobody in the world has less wisdom and less knowledge of mankind than the German professor. According to this writer, who apparently thought of men like Schneider, the professors bear the burden of the guilt for all misfortunes.

These followers of the Revolution were no men of action, but scribbling dialecticians who at best were guided by a sentimental love of humanity. There are in Germany too many new, too few common ideas, says Madame de Staël. The intellectuals revelled in discussions, and were able to plunge into a fresh enthusiasm every day. A contemporary writer described them very accurately when he wrote: "To change the Constitution of a country seems to them the same task as to write a leaflet or to introduce a new prayer book. They have lived too much in the world of books not to go astray in the real world."¹

This social group, like the entire middle class, had developed no consciousness of its social status. Its members felt themselves equal to the nobility, or at any rate they wished to be so, and in consequence their first demand was the abolition of all privileges. They could not, however, succeed in freeing themselves from the influence of the nobility, and some of the middle-class intellectuals, like Rehberg and Adam Müller, became the most ardent protagonists of the nobility. On the other hand, they looked with deep contempt on the great masses of the impecunious population, even though they advocated an improvement of their economic position. Möser denounced in the *Berliner Monatsschrift* in 1791 any change of the Constitution through the people. Archenholtz, the editor of the *Minerva*, does not want to include in the term

¹ Hansen, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 272.

“nation” the lower classes and calls them “half men.” “The greater part of our German fellow-burghers and peasants are still far too backward to have such a notion of a Constitution as the French have,” says a pamphlet of 1791.¹ Schlözer issues a warning in Reichard’s *Deutschland* against installing public assemblies in the manner of the English. “He who is not yet used to a certain freedom is only too apt to misuse it.”² We shall see that even Kant did not want the lower classes to participate in the State as active citizens.

To this type of unruly radical spirits belongs Georg Forster, who perhaps is the most famous of the German protagonists of the French ideas. One trait is conspicuous in him which we shall meet repeatedly in others. This man, who was considered in Germany to be a dangerous revolutionary, was in truth not politically minded. His writings and his correspondence contain up to the year 1790 hardly a reference to politics, and as late as in 1792 he complained that he was forced to meddle in political matters because the booksellers wanted him to do so. Although he sympathised from the beginning with the social ideas of the French Revolution, at first he had little belief in the necessity or even possibility of a revolution in Germany.³ In his opinion, Germany had paid the expenses of the Reformation for Europe, now France might make the revolution for Germany as well. In the nine volumes of his writings there cannot be found any political system or even any constructive political ideas. He was essentially a rational cosmopolitan, with occasional sentimental and mystical lapses. On July 30, 1789, he wrote with obvious reference to the Revolution to Heyne: “It is good to see what philosophy has matured in the minds of men and then achieved in the State. Never before was such an example that so radical a change could cost so little blood-

¹ *Der Kreuzzug gegen die Franken*, Hansen, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 902. The anonymous author of this interesting pamphlet warns the princes at the same time not to rely too much on the ignorance of the masses. He is, like most of the intellectuals, strongly opposed to the war of intervention.

² Reichard, *Deutschland*, vol. ii, p. 203.

³ *Works*, vol. viii, p. 248.

shed and ruin."¹ His point of departure was a passionate love of freedom and a deep hatred of princes and noblemen. "You know," he wrote to Johannes von Müller in November 1792, "that liberty has always been and will always be to my mind the greatest, the most precious of all assets: without it, there can be, in my opinion, no true well-being, no public happiness." Of the nature of this liberty, however, he had no idea, or only very vague ones.

If the assertion of Professor Petersen is right, that the "Aufklärung" produced in Germany a particular type of man, that of the honest man, Forster is a typical offspring of the "Aufklärung."² The motives from which he acts are always pure; and he is sincerely convinced that the secession of Mainz to France would be a blessing to his compatriots. Sentimentalist as he is, he always wavers between hope and despair. Sometimes he is seized by a deep loathing of life, as for instance when he writes: "To find always selfishness and passion when you expect and demand greatness, always nothing but words instead of feeling, always only boasting instead of real being, and working, who can endure that?" And yet Forster also would not have committed himself as unreservedly to the ideas of the Revolution as he came to do, if his life had possessed a calmer and more stable element. This German revolutionary was really without a home. He had grown up in England, had passed the greater part of his early manhood abroad, partly on travels, and had never come to rest, never settled down. As a youth of twenty, he had already taken part in Cook's voyage round the world, of which he has written an excellent record. From this voyage he brought home an indomitable desire for the remote, a vague longing for humanity. We are therefore not surprised to find in a letter to Voss of November 1792: "Ubi bene, ibi patria. This must remain the motto of a scholar."³ Tormented by economic troubles, unhappily married, he throws himself into the

¹ *Works*, vol. viii, p. 84.

² Cf. Petersen, *die Wesensbestimmung der deutschen Romantik*, p. 130.

³ *Works*, vol. viii, p. 274.

Revolution in the hope of finding a foothold, only to discover that he has flung himself into an abyss. His wife testifies that he would never have embarked on the dubious adventure of joining the Club of the Jacobins in Mainz if he had been in secure circumstances.¹ As late as 1792 he declared in another letter to Voss that he did not consider Germany ripe for a revolution, and that only reforms would be possible. His revolutionary ideology accordingly was only a protest, an escape from an unwelcome environment; it had not grown up in an organic connection with national or social problems. He was torn between admiration for the Revolution and fear of its fanaticism. Fundamentally he wanted only a constitutionally limited monarchy after the model of England.² His political utterances show that vagueness and uncertainty which was so characteristic in this period of humanitarian cosmopolitanism. This is nowhere better expressed than in the following passage: "Somewhere the good is bound to come to light to expand itself over the whole earth; an inhabitant of Mainz invented the art of printing, why should not a Frenchman invent the liberty of the eighteenth century?"³ The question of nationality meant nothing to him. "Our languages are different, must our ideas therefore also be different?" so he asked in a speech in which he advocated the political union of Mainz and France.⁴ Thus Forster was not a political leader, nor can he be said to have rendered a valuable contribution to the history of political thought. Nevertheless, he cannot be omitted from a record of this history because he is a characteristic representative of that class of literary Utopians who were to play such a considerable part in the nineteenth century in Germany, and we find in him outspokenly liberal ideas.⁵ Had he been born

¹ Cf. Klein, *Forster in Mainz*, pp. 236 ff., 260 ff.

² On April 13, 1793, he wrote to his wife from Paris: "I admit that it does me good to be with Englishmen and to enjoy their sober sense of liberty instead of the highfalutin fanaticism which prevails here." In the last phase of his life he was deeply impressed by Godwin's *Enquiry on Political Justice*.

⁴ Hansen, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 585.

³ Works, vol. vi, p. 146.
⁵ Cf. *Works*, vol. iii, p. 39.

fifty years later he might have become one of the leaders in the struggles of the middle class for a liberal Constitution.

Forster belonged to a group of men who had formed a political club in Mainz after the French had captured the town. They were radical cosmopolitans who under the influence of Kant regarded the State solely as the means of leading man to moral perfection.¹ They were adherents of benevolent despotism as long as the enlightened rulers favoured their efforts for tolerance and a vague humanitarianism. When the princes, however, under the influence of the Revolution began to denounce the Enlightenment and to suppress their activity they turned into radical Republicans. They were strongly in favour of a union of the Rhineland with France, which seemed to them the only guarantee of freedom and equality. They found little support amongst the people, who on the whole remained faithful to the Empire.

Immediately after the Revolution a stream of radical pamphlets was poured out which were concerned with political problems, whereas previously theological, philosophic or moral questions had been discussed. "The French Revolution pushes everything into the background because of the interest which it arouses," complains Archenholtz in his periodical, "the best poems remain unread, people only take up newspapers, and such pamphlets as satisfy the hunger for politics."² And the *Berliner Monatsschrift* writes ironically: "Blessed age. Soon our Germany will be crowded with politicians and geniuses."

The faith in the durability of the existing order had begun to shake. "Not only are the peasants and the lower burghers discontented, but more generally perhaps that class which has so great and manifold an influence and stands between those and the nobles," thus a contemporary writer sums up the situation.³ The criticism sometimes assumed a very threatening and radical form. As early as in 1783 the *Berliner Monatsschrift*,

¹ "We must always act so that our action can become a universal law, since one man has just as many rights as another." Wedekind, *Ueber Freiheit und Gleichheit*, p. 4.

² Heigel, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 275.

³ Wenck, *Deutschland vor 100 Jahren*, vol. ii, p. 74.

that spokesman of Enlightenment, to which men like Kant contributed, had published a poem written significantly by a professor, in which America was glorified and an immanent republicanisation of Europe predicted. In 1788 another periodical, *The Deutsche Museum*, published a poem on the occasion of the birth of a prince in which his fate was regretted. "Comedies and novels teem with declarations against the nobility," we read in the *Berliner Monatsschrift* in 1786.¹

If we consider systematically the attitude of the German intellectuals towards political questions, especially towards the French Revolution, we notice that no political parties in the modern sense, or even in the sense in which they had developed in England, existed in Germany. The formation of parties was made impossible from the start by the political and economic disintegration of Germany. In a pamphlet of 1788 an anonymous author rightly complains that the Germans lacked a centre for any sort of patriotism. Not all people, however, felt like this writer. Many were convinced that German particularism was a blessing to German civilisation, as the curator of the University of Bonn expressed it in an oration delivered in 1789. On account of the suppression of the Press in many parts of the Reich, a free public opinion, which is indispensable to the formation of parties, could not develop. Even Schröter, who enjoyed a comparatively free position in British Hanover, was in fact fettered. For example, he dared not attack Prussia because by doing so he would have come into conflict with his sovereign, who wanted to be on good terms with this important Power. There was in fact no public opinion at all in Germany. "We have seven thousand writers," Forster complained, "and still there exists no public opinion in Germany."²

Almost all intellectuals at first hailed the Revolution with enthusiasm, or showed at least sympathy. Even men like Gentz and Adam Müller who were to become its most embittered adversaries declared themselves for it at first. Kant only expressed the view of most of his contemporaries when he saw a

¹ Heigel, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 280.

² Works, vol. iii, p. 362.

proof of the progress of mankind in the enthusiasm with which the Revolution was hailed in Germany. "I should consider a failure of this Revolution as one of the greatest misfortunes that ever happened to mankind," writes Gentz to Garve; "it is the first practical triumph of philosophy, the first example of a constitution based on principles and on a coherent system; it is the hope and the comfort for so many old evils under which mankind suffer."¹ This sounds somewhat abstract and intellectual, and it was not to remain the opinion of Gentz, who in his heart was anything but a revolutionary.

In order to understand why most intellectuals were attracted by the Revolution, regardless of their political views in other respects, we must take into account their social situation. Many of them had experienced the dangers and suffering caused by the absolutist system, some of them like Schubart and Möser to their personal cost. Even the country in which Enlightenment seemed to prevail, Prussia had after Frederick the Great's death become the centre of obscurantism. They saw at first in the Revolution only the attack against absolutism and expected from its success a wholesome influence on the German princes. At the same time they were sons of the age of Enlightenment who believed in the victory of reason over mankind in the development of continuous progress.² It is very characteristic that many of those who were in favour of the Revolution also admired Frederick the Great.³ Woltmann expressed no more than a general belief when he in his periodical, *Geschichte und Politik*, tried to prove that Man was on the way to approach the goal of a perfect development of all his forces. They were therefore cosmopolitans who did not comprehend that the French in their Revolution tried to solve, at least to some extent, purely French problems. The Revolu-

¹ Wittichen, *Briefe von und an Gentz*, vol. i, p. 180.

² Cf. Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*, 1795, p. 320: "Il arrivera donc, ce moment où le soleil n'éclairera plus, sur la terre, que des hommes libres, et ne reconnaissant d'autre maître que leur raison; où les tyrans et les esclaves, les prêtres et leurs stupides ou hypocrites instruments n'existeront plus que dans l'histoire et sur les théâtres."

³ Cf. Klopstock's Ode, "die Etat Généraux."

tion seemed to them, as Gentz expressed it, a triumph of philosophy, a sacrifice in the name of humanity, and the beginning of a new era. "The more the Revolution extends itself," writes Weishaupt, the founder of the "Illuminati," the more superfluous the princes will become; mankind—in the distant future, it is true—will be only one family; and the world will be the abode of sensible beings without violence and breach of order."¹ This was in keeping with the general belief that happiness was the goal which mankind had to attain. "The first aim of society is to bring about the greatest possible happiness of all its members," writes Schönebeck in his *Code of Pure Reason* in 1789. The French Revolution was considered as an attempt to attain this happiness, in fulfilment of Rousseau's saying, "Quelle est la fin de l'association politique? C'est la conservation et la prospérité de ses membres."² The attitude of the progressively-minded intellectuals is excellently summed up in an article written by Archenholz in 1792. He confessed that he loved the Revolution "because it abolished countless abuses and indescribable atrocities." He declared himself in favour of the Constitution and against the Jacobins. His aim in this article was to show that love for the Revolution and patriotism are compatible with one another.³

Naturally it was those who regarded the Revolution as the embodiment of Enlightenment who were the most disappointed when the irrational forces broke through.⁴ At all events, they had no understanding for the patriotic tendencies which appeared in France, especially after the Brunswick Manifesto was issued. The Revolution was for most of these people in the first place a subject for discussion, a sort of theatrical show, to be enjoyed intellectually. "Whereas in France," Heigel writes, "there burns a hatred which will not cease till everything that

¹ Heigel, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 277.

² *Contrat Social*, book iii, ch. 9.

³ *Minerva*, 1792, 3, p. 179.

⁴ In this context a letter may be quoted which the philosopher Jacobi wrote to Frau Reimarus: "Since 1789 I have become more and more despondent. Altogether I do not see how mankind can be saved. I trust therefore in the Day of Judgment." Quoted in Bauer, *Deutschland während der Zeit der französischen Revolution*, p. 19.

exists is destroyed, the German delights in dogmatic arguments which lead to a condemnation of all prevailing notions of community of men and of the economic order, but which do not induce to rebellion and destruction.”¹ The ideas of the Revolution were taken over only in so far as they were of a general humanitarian character, but they were deprived of their true meaning as revolutionary claims and were merely used as slogans. Thus a concept such as that of the Rights of Man, which had played so revolutionary a part in France, could be used both by the revolutionary Fichte and by the reactionary Gentz. Gentz, however, took the edge off this dangerous concept by using the Rights of Man as a general regulative principle, and denying it any character of a legal claim of the individual on the State. In this innocuous form the Rights of Man could even appear in the new Prussian Code.

In 1792 a pamphlet of the above-mentioned J. L. Ewald appeared under the title *On Revolutions, their sources and the means to be used against them*. This writing is typical of the character of the prevailing political issues. It points to a fact which seems obvious but nevertheless appears to have been unknown. “If the peoples rebel, it is always misgovernment which must be blamed for it.” The author therefore protests against absolutism, particularly against the extravagance of the princes, their slave-trade and their misuse of hunting privileges, but we find in this interesting document nothing of the ideology of the French Revolution. Ewald even makes fun of the dogma of equality, which he declares to be a utopian dream, but he demands at least a certain degree of freedom, above all, freedom of religion and the Press. He defines freedom vaguely as follows: “It consists in the right of the people, that is to say, of all citizens to let themselves be governed by an authority which they have voluntarily appointed, or at least assented to according to certain exactly fixed principles.” This parson, whose views, mild as they were, got him into trouble with his

¹ Heigel, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 127.

Government, can be viewed as a typical spokesman of the intellectuals who did not dream of questioning the foundations of the social organisation.

Such political reflection and sentiment as existed, however, were fascinated by the Revolution and depended essentially on the reception and elaboration of the immense material of facts and ideas which flowed in from beyond the Rhine.¹ But since this mass of ideas could not find a fertile soil in Germany, it did not lead to a decisive change in the situation. In general, the circles connected with the universities were the promoters of liberal ideas, but their sense of freedom was not very highly developed. It found expression in a weak movement for reforms which was also supported by some nobles and princes. In the upper classes of society also these reforms became topics of discussion. This is expressed by the well-known philosopher Reinhold when he wrote: "Political revolutions are at present impossible with us, but reforms perhaps more than ever necessary. Improvement of our Constitution cannot come about by force either on the part of the princes or of the subjects, but only through better understanding and good-will."² Some of the princes even showed an outspoken sympathy for the Revolution, as, for instance, the eccentric Duchess of Gotha, who is reported to have placed and replaced the busts of the heroes of the Revolution in her drawing-room according to their accession to power.

Many looked upon the French events from an aesthetic and not a political point of view. "Perhaps," Novalis says, "in certain years we all love revolutions, free competitions, contests and democratic phenomena of all sorts. Those years, however, pass by in most cases, and we feel attracted by a more peaceful world."³ With these words Novalis points to the fact that for many of the young generation the enthusiasm for the Revolution was but a vague protest against an already decayed world.

¹ Wenck, *Deutschland vor 100 Jahren*, p. 221.

² *Neue deutsche Merkur*, 1793, p. 399.

³ Novalis, *Works*, ed. Minor, vol. ii, pp. 55, 169.

The majority of these men, whether they were liberals like Humboldt, or reactionaries like Gentz—if it is at all permissible to apply these modern terms—had a deep distrust of abrupt actions, and preferred a slow way of reform.

Even the most famous political writer of this time in Germany, Schröder, has contributed little towards the enrichment of political philosophy. Great though his merits were in his struggle against absolutism and in his capacity as the first political journalist in Germany, he too desired only mild reforms which would lead to a constitutionally limited monarchy through the limitation of the prerogatives of the nobility and a reform of the Reich. His deep admiration for the Holy Roman Empire prevented him from realising that it was irrevocably doomed. He was opposed to absolutism, which he called a *crimen laesi generis humani*; but he believed that monarchy was a divine institution provided the monarch furthered the happiness of his subjects. Schröder was a typical representative of the enlightened bourgeoisie which believed that it was the task of the prince to propagate Enlightenment and that an enlightened prince would be the best guarantee for general progress. Although he believed in the social contract, his starting-point was the historically established authority. But he went so far as to demand that the power of the prince ought to be controlled by representative bodies, and thus he went beyond benevolent despotism and raised for the first time liberal demands. “We ought to preach it everywhere,” he wrote, “that the ruler has been made for the sake of the people and not by God, that he has to render account to this people and this earlier than on Judgment Day; all townsfolk, the professor, the landed proprietor and the peasant must bear equal burdens because they enjoy the same protection, we must preach this, I say, aloud and need not be afraid of any revolution.”¹ Schröder strongly attacked the American Revolution, and one cannot help thinking that this was due to the fact that he was a subject of George III. Towards

¹ *Staatsanzeiger*, vol. xvii, p. 253 footnote.

the French Revolution, after a short hesitation, he was frankly hostile.¹

Schlözer belonged to a group of writers who stood in opposition to the restless minds described above. A number of intellectuals appeared who shrank from the demands for radical change, because they recognised clearly that the economic interests of the middle class would be endangered, were the old order of society to be reorganised too radically. These conservative thinkers came mostly from parts where a sound class of peasants had grown up, and thus we are able to discover already the antagonism between town and country in political opinion, which was to play such a decisive part in German politics in the future. None of these thinkers, however, was able to oppose to the French doctrines anything approaching a system of political philosophy. This is partly accounted for by the ambiguity of their intellectual position. They tried to defend a state of affairs the untenability of which they clearly recognised. They wanted reforms, but they were forced to realise that these reforms could only be brought about by a radical reformation of the political order which they feared and did not want. In order to understand their attitude we have to take into account the environment in which they had grown up.

Most of these conservative thinkers came from the northwest of Germany, from Hanover or Osnabrück. The small states in which they were active officials had undergone a development which differentiated them clearly from most of the other states in Germany. Osnabrück was almost an absurd example of the whims of historic development. According to the Treaty of Westphalia it was governed by a Catholic and a Protestant bishop in turn, and it was there that tradition and custom had been preserved almost unchanged. The country was administered by middle-class officials who had not only

¹ See Heigel, *Deutsche Geschichte vom Tode Friedrichs des Grossen*, vol. i, p. 296. Cf. also A. L. v. Schlözer's *Staatsauffassung*, by A. Berney, in *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. cxxxii, p. 43.

attained influential positions but also social esteem, and whose main task was to bring about compromises between the Government and the landed proprietors. All this made for a certain narrow-mindedness, for a distrust of cosmopolitanism and of generalisation. Politics with them was a matter of expediency and not an application of theoretical principles, and gradual reforms were the first concern of the bureaucracy.

Hanover owed its exceptional position to its relation to Britain. The absence of a court prevented the existence of a class of courtiers and their hangers-on, and thus a growing self-confidence developed among the middle class who prided themselves on being British subjects. The feudal system, or at least its hardships, had gradually disappeared and a class of free peasants had developed who tended to have a conservative outlook in political affairs. This conservatism, which is said to be one of the racial characteristics of the slow-moving and reserved northern German, was tempered by liberal influence from England, with which a close intellectual relation was maintained.

It was in this atmosphere that three important political thinkers grew up, Möser, Brandes and Rehberg. With the most important of them, Möser, we shall have to deal in a later chapter when we discuss the Romantic Movement to which he was an influential precursor. The other two were Hanoverian officials, of whom Brandes was a friend of Burke and Rehberg a personal disciple of Möser, under whom he had worked in Osnabrück. Brandes had been to England and was held to be one of the best connoisseurs of English politics in Germany. He admired the English Constitution and was in favour of a monarchy for Germany which would be constitutionally limited as in England. "Every State," so he admitted, "in which the people do not have a share in the Legislature, either directly or through representatives elected from time to time, has had a bad Constitution."¹ He clearly realised that the claim to liberty which had been voiced so passionately by

¹ *Politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution*, p. 8.

many of his contemporaries could not wholly be neglected. "Passion for liberty," he said somewhat vaguely, "is the noblest of human propensities, but it must be guided by reason lest we should be led by it from the right way."¹ Much as he disliked the French Revolution he was wise enough to recognise that it was the outcome of an historic development and the expression of political forces and not only the wicked enterprise of some ambitious lawyers abetted by the *philosophes*. Thus he wrote expressing the opinion of most of his contemporaries: "The majority of the nobles in France have to blame themselves for all the evil that oppresses them now."² Nevertheless, he was willing to grant to the nobility a superior place in the State although he demanded that all citizens should be admitted to the State service. In this he was the spokesman of the middle class whose members were very soon to be the backbone of the bureaucracy.

The point in which he differed from most of his contemporaries is in his dislike of the concept of Natural Law. The idea of a law which was generally valid seemed absurd to him who had grown up in a country in which a variety of customary laws existed which were the delight of the lawyer but made the idea of Natural Law seem ridiculous and utopian. Thus he was strongly in favour of maintaining the difference between classes, and he even went so far as to defend slavery as a social institution.³

Rehberg shared Brandes' opinions on Natural Law. He anticipated the later thinkers of the Historic School by maintaining that laws can at best stabilise existing customs but never create new rights. In his opinion the State is not founded on reason but on experience. The concept of an ideal Constitution seemed utterly impossible to him, and like Burke he blamed the French for attempting to create a Constitution which was not modelled on French history and adapted to particular

¹ Op. cit., p. 7.

² Cf. Hay, I., *Staat, Volk und Weltbürgertum in der Berliner Monatsschrift*, p. 27.

³ Op. cit., p. 104.

French requirements but was the creation of doctrinaires. His ideal of the State was still that of the Enlightenment; its aim was to promote the happiness of its citizens, but he already put forward ideas which pointed the way to the organic concept of the Romantics.¹ He stressed the fact that the State was not merely the organisation of the people who actually lived in it, but was the present form of an organism in which the ancestors had just as great a share as the contemporaries.² "Each Constitution," so he wrote, "even the most perfect one, is based on the gradual development of factors and institutions which are partly determined by Nature, partly by human intelligence and will. Each generation lays the foundation for what the next one is going to perform and the later can build only on that which the earlier has achieved."³ Thus Rehberg denied to the people the right to change the Constitution since they cannot alter that which was brought into being by their ancestors. Inconsistently, however, he granted the right to alter the Constitution to the Government. The only right of man he was willing to acknowledge was that of property, which he considered the mainstay of society. In his opinion the proprietor was the only true citizen, and he was in favour of a Constitution in which an assembly of landed proprietors and wealthy merchants would control and check the Crown.

Rehberg reviewed from 1790 to 1793 in the *Jenaer Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* all writings which dealt with the French Revolution. He was significantly convinced that a sober discussion of the revolutionary principles would be sufficient to bring excited minds to reason. He was opposed to the Revolution, in which he saw a triumph of Natural Law. "Metaphysics have annihilated the French monarchy and brought about an unparalleled revolution."⁴ In this dislike for "Metaphysics" we hear Burke's voice.

¹ Cf. Lessing, K., *Rehberg und die französische Revolution*, p. 42.

² Cf. Burke's phrase "people will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors."

³ *Untersuchungen zur französischen Revolution*, vol. i, p. 56.

⁴ Loc. cit., vol. i, p. 5. For Rehberg's attitude to the Revolution, see Gooch, loc. cit., p. 78.

Neither Rehberg nor Brandes was a thinker of the first rank, though they certainly influenced the attitude of their fellow-countrymen towards the Revolution considerably. They were rather critics than productive political thinkers, for the time had not yet come to formulate a theory in which the organic concept was to be connected with the concept of a strong and centralised State.

In these thinkers the same tendency appeared which was to become the essence of Romanticism, a strong distrust of reason and a belief in the forces which can be found in tradition. Although they were opposed to Natural Law, they still thought in the terms of the Enlightenment, and their criticism of the Revolution was based on general rational principles. Therefore they tried in vain to understand the actions which accompanied the Revolution.

This belief in the power of reason was intelligible in the period of Enlightenment. Others tried to explain the events in a supernatural way. "There was indeed," as Wenck writes, "in those times, apart from all enlightenment, a considerable tendency to believe in the most mysterious forces of secret associations of a rational or irrational kind, to blame these associations for anything striking, to fear them and draw hope from them in many ways."¹

In 1773 the Order of the Jesuits had been dissolved. This was a concession to the prevailing spirit of rationalism. The mystical tendencies, however, grew and allied themselves with the natural sciences. The result was a pseudo-scientific superstition which was as strong as in the Middle Ages. Numerous new orders or organisations grew up, many of which sympathised with the ideas of freedom and equality, and all of which were imbued with a vague humanitarian spirit. They attracted above all the middle classes. The list of the members of the Order of the Illuminati in Aix-la-Chapelle, Bonn, Düsseldorf, Duisburg, Coblenz, Cologne and Mayence contain exclusively officials, doctors, officers, lawyers, priests,

¹ Wenck, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 39.

professors and some merchants.¹ The reason for this is that serious-minded and educated people could not find satisfaction in politics from which they were excluded by the absolutist system, and joined therefore these secret societies which stood for the ideals of Enlightenment.

From a hopeless present men fled into a realm of imagination and spiritualism, and men like Swedenborg and Mesmer were held in great repute. In 1789 the impostor Cagliostro, who had made use of and lived on these mystic tendencies, had been arrested and tried.²

For many people the Revolution was not an event which could be explained historically, but was the result of a mysterious conspiracy of international forces.³ In the *Journal für und von Deutschland* an anonymous writer asserts that America had chosen the dogma of freedom and liberty only because she wanted to ruin Europe and to force Europeans to emigrate because she needed labour for her underpopulated districts. The assassination of Gustave III of Sweden was brought into relation with the Revolution, although it had little or nothing to do with it. In the summer of 1790 a "denonciation à toutes les puissances d'un plan de conspiration" appeared.⁴ The Freemasons and Illuminati, themselves an expression of the interest in the mysterious, were the object of the wildest conjectures and accusations.⁵ In 1782 a congress of Freemasons had been held in Wilhelmsbad at which a reorganisation of the Order was discussed. The proceedings, as is the custom with Freemasons, were kept secret. It was alleged that the Revolution had been mapped out at this congress. Mornet in his book, already quoted, has shown that all allegations of this kind were without foundation. But many people believed in them vigorously. The Abbé Barruel published in 1796 his abstruse and voluminous work, *Mémoirs pour servir à l'histoire du*

¹ See Hansen, op. cit., vol. i, p. 41 ff.

² Sierke, *Schwärmer und Schwindler zu Ende des XVIII Jahrhunderts*.

³ Cf. Brandes, *Betrachtungen über den Zeitgeist in Deutschland*, p. 89 ff.

⁴ Cf. Le Forestier, p. 634, *Hamburger Politisches Journal*, August 1790.

⁵ Cf. Mornet, *Les Origines Intellectuelles de la Révolution Française*, p. 357 ff.

Jacobinism, which even the German Emperor forbade as being a libellous book.¹ In England Robinson published in 1797 *Proofs of a conspiracy against all religions and governments of Europe carried on in the secret meetings of freemasons, illuminati, and reading societies*.² In Vienna Hoffman devoted a whole periodical to a struggle against the Freemasons, who "want to get hold of the opinion of men, to turn everything upside down, and put kings in the dust and schoolmasters on the throne."³ It seems as if men in times of great trouble and revolutionary change anxiously ask for the reason. As they are unable to survey the events and to look behind the scene they have resort to primitive explanations. The rulers who are not willing to admit their own faults are only too ready to fix the blame on conspirators in whom the people believe much as primitive tribes believe in demons and the mysterious forces of nature. Numerous pens were employed in abusing the revolutionary ideas. "Freedom and Equality are the talismans of scoundrels, the meeting-place of deceivers and deceived," so a contributor to *Das Journal für und von Deutschland* wrote in 1791.⁴ The Revolution is styled as a "moral pest" in 1791.⁵

If we look back on political life in Germany at this period we gain the impression that amid this welter of opinions, indecisiveness, accusations and attempts at reforms no point of departure can be found for a new political life. An old social system collapses and needs even for its collapse the outward impulse which emanates from the Revolution and Napoleon. "At a time," as Hettner puts it, "when in England the Letters of Junius deeply stirred public opinion, when in France the influence of Montesquieu and Rousseau and the Encyclo-

¹ *Neuer deutsche Merkur*, 1800, vol. ii, p. 91.

² Cf. Le Forestier, *Les Illuminés de Bavière*, p. 676 ff, Mrs. Nesta Webster is still convinced that the French Revolution was the result of a sinister conspiracy. Cf. her book, *The French Revolution*, 4th edition, 1926. Mrs. Webster, incidentally, does not even mention Le Forestier.

³ Braubach, M., *Die katholischen Universitäten und die französische Revolution*, *Historisches Jahrbuch*, vol. xl ix, p. 263 ff.

⁴ *Neuer deutsche Merkur*, 1791, p. 426.

⁵ Bauer, loc. cit., p. 35.

pedists added fuel to the fire which was to flame up in the Revolution, when America fought for liberty and independence, in Germany people were occupied with the question whether the State was something accidental or merely a necessary evil.”¹

The only German State which could have become a centre of political strength had sunk under the weak government of Frederick William II into complete lethargy. An hypocritical obscurantism prevailed, and the mere assertion that without the idea of an original contract law cannot be conceived was considered Jacobinism. In contradiction to Goethe’s idea of Humanity the Prussian Government issued the notorious “Religionsedikt” of 1788 by which all intellectual life was to be controlled.

The “Aufklärung” was made responsible for the Revolution and all movements which stood for its ideals were suppressed.² In vain did Professor Scheller in Salzburg protest that it was ridiculous to blame philosophy and Enlightenment for the Revolution, in vain did even Dalberg raise his voice to point out that revolutions have other causes than philosophic treatises.³ Obscurantism grew apace.⁴

The class of intellectuals who had greeted the Revolution with hope watched reaction arising everywhere calmly. In many instances they served the princes with shameless servility. Thus Johannes von Müller, the famous historian, praised the Landgrave of Hesse in a dithyrambic oration at the inauguration of the *Carolinum*. For this institution the prince, apparently to appease his bad conscience, had given money which he had earned from the sale of his subjects to England. Although

¹ *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur*, vol. ii, p. 107.

² The Elector of Bavaria forbade the “Illuminatenorden” in 1786.

³ Cf. Dalberg’s essay *von dem Einfluss der Wissenschaften und schönen Künste in Beziehung auf öffentliche Ruhe*, 1793; A. G. Köstner’s *Gedanken über das Unvermögen der Schriftsteller, Empörungen zu bewirken*, 1793. An anonymous writer investigated the question whether the Enlightenment favoured revolutions and answered this question emphatically in the negative, *Berliner Monatsschrift*, January 1794.

⁴ Cf. Heigel, op. cit., vol. ii, p. 123 ff.

Müller knew this fact he hailed the prince as "the benefactor of the citizens."¹

The princes, scared by the success of the Revolution in France and encouraged by the cowardice and indecision of their subjects, ruthlessly suppressed every tendency suspected of liberalism.² Schlözer's journal had to cease publication in 1794, the Bavarian Government forbade all books which so much as mentioned the Revolution, and thus curiously Burke's *Reflections* appeared on a list of forbidden books.³ The ex-Jesuit Stattler explained in a pamphlet in 1791 that the principles of Nicolai's *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* formed the foundation for the dogmas of the French Revolution.⁴ Although he did Nicolai far too much honour by this absurd accusation the Prussian Government in 1794 forbade this completely harmless periodical.⁵ Innocuous clubs were unmasks as associations of Jacobins, all secret societies were suppressed, and all movements of reform forbidden. The decaying system once again drew together all its strength to ward off the collapse which yet was inevitable.

¹ On May 20, 1792, Trenk published an enthusiastic encomium about the Prince Frederick Charles of Wied, who was deposed by the "Reichskammergericht" in 1793 as unfit to govern. Hansen, op. cit., vol. ii, pp. 19, 864.

² A Decree of Frederick William II of Prussia from September 14, 1798, demanded that the authorities should take care that "die Zeitungen sich alles desjenigen, was auf das grosse Publikum als Anpreisung und Beförderung des revolutionären Schwindelgeistes und politischen Neuerungssucht dienen kann, in Erzählungen und Räsonnements, auch wenn solche in andern fremden Zeitungen schon gedruckt wären, enthalten." Bauer, op. cit., p. 105.

³ Fr. Braune, *C. Burke in Deutschland*, p. 5.

⁴ Le Forestier, p. 647.

⁵ Cf. Ost, G., *F. Nicolais Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*. Berlin, 1928, p. 87 ff.

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This bibliography, though of course not exhaustive, is purposely made extensive in order to aid the student who is interested in this period.

CHAPTER II

THE POLITICAL IDEAS OF KANT

THE political thinkers in Germany in the eighteenth century until the time of the French Revolution were unanimous in their belief that benevolent despotism was the quintessence of political wisdom. This is the chief reason why the political thought of this period is so dull and uninspiring. It becomes interesting only occasionally when, as in the case of Schlözer, the principles of this political wisdom were employed in criticising those rulers who were more despotic than benevolent. After the Revolution, however, it became evident that absolutism in any form was a thing of the past, since the rising middle classes demanded a share in the government and the events in France had discredited the absolutist system for ever. We showed in the first chapter how suddenly a lively discussion of political questions developed, discussion that has never since stopped. The task with which this generation was confronted was to outline the political form under which it would be able to fulfil its economic and social function and to lay the foundations for the powerful State of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In 1800 Jenisch published a book on the spirit and the character of the eighteenth century. In it he summed up the effects which in his opinion the Revolution had had on European thought. It had, first of all, drawn the attention of the European nations to the task of improving the political conditions under which men lived, it had revealed the "*terrible secret of the power of the people*," it had imbued the nations with admiration for the republican Constitution and it had finally upset the *ancien régime* in several European countries.¹

If we survey the different answers which the thinkers in Germany gave to the political problems we can make the

¹ Jenisch, *Geist und Charakter des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, vol. i, p. 235 ff.

following classification. There was first that group of thinkers who saw in the Revolution the fulfilment of the ideals of the Enlightenment and who demanded that the principles of equality and liberty should become the basis of political life in Germany too. To this group of men, who may be called liberals, Kant and Fichte belong. Kant, however, introduced a new element into German political thought. His idealist and moralist attitude penetrated into his political ideas, and it was under his influence that subsequent thinkers developed systems in which moral and political issues were mixed in a way which is peculiar to German political thought and characteristic of the thought of the German middle classes.

Another group of thinkers who were likewise under the influence of the Revolution learned a different lesson from it. It brought home to them the immense danger with which the individual was threatened if the State became too powerful, and as they were primarily concerned with the intellectual and moral welfare of the individual they advocated a policy of non-intervention on the part of the State and of indifference to political affairs on the part of the citizens. To this group Humboldt and the Classicists belong.

This individualistic and rationalist attitude, which was the reflection of the emancipation of the middle classes from the fetters of mercantilism, was given up by a third group of thinkers. They opposed the principles of the Revolution by developing an historical theory of State and society and insisted on maintaining the traditional links with the past. This group was that of the Romantics.

When Kant published in 1784 his *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, the first writing in which he dealt with political questions extensively, the whole of political thought in Germany was still determined by the theories of Natural Law. Natural Law proceeded from the logical concept of freedom and regarded the individual as isolated from all historical conditions. This does not mean that in this period there was no interest in history; the thinkers

of the eighteenth century were unhistorically-minded only in the sense that they were more interested in the philosophy of history than in history itself, and as Carritt puts it, "so-called philosophies of history have a somewhat questionable relation to history; they have sometimes been suspected of being attempts to enlist historical theories in the service of philosophical theory or political creed."¹ They have indeed been used for the justification of a certain distribution of power in society and for the refutation of the claims of those classes which were excluded from that power.

All systems of Natural Law were based on the assumption that it was the task of the Government to provide happiness and that happiness was the highest aim in human life.² Christian von Wolff, whose doctrine dominated the age, declared the highest law of nature to be the aspiration for intellectual and physical perfection, which in his opinion was tantamount to happiness. According to Wolff, it is the duty of man to make himself and others perfect, and since he has the obligation to promote happiness he has also a claim that others should promote his own happiness.

This belief in happiness found its expression in the mercantilist conception of the State, according to which the prince tried to promote the economic welfare of his subjects and felt himself entitled to interfere with their life even in minute details of personal habit.

The theory of Natural Law as it developed in the eighteenth century has its roots in the social order of the Middle Ages. The idea of the *universitas mundi*, of which it is only one application, had even survived the Reformation, and, as Gierke pointed out, the religious revival which was one of the consequences of the Reformation even gave new nourishment to the

¹ Carritt, *Morals and Politics*, p. 97. Cf. Dilthey's brilliant essay *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die geschichtliche Welt. Schriften*, vol. iii, p. 209 f.

² Thus Achenwall writes: "The final aim of every single member of the State is and remains his own happiness, to the attainment of which he regards the State as a necessary means." Hufeland writes: "All laws of nature order us to do that which is good for us and to forbear from that which is detrimental."

idea of Natural Law.¹ In the eighteenth century, however, this idea had been separated from its religious foundation and reason had taken the place of nature. The Law of Nature had become the Law of Reason and Kant's political philosophy is the culmination of this development.²

It might seem strange that the idea of Natural Law could prevail for so long after the mediaeval world had been dissolved into national units, but in fact the breaking up of the mediaeval *universitas* greatly helped to strengthen the concept of Natural Law. The more the old Christian order was dissolved into distinct legal units the stronger the need was felt for some universal source from which all particular laws could be derived. The fundamental belief of the teachers of Natural Law in a law which transcended national frontiers was the fitting expression of a society whose upper classes had closer cultural and social relations to the upper classes of other countries than to their own lower classes.

If we survey the innumerable theories of Natural Law which appeared in Germany in the eighteenth century we are surprised at the monotony and aridity of their concepts. In scores of handbooks on Natural Law there is a shallow rationalism, and even the famous Wolff produces chiefly commonplaces in his system. All these lawyers and philosophers had little political significance, and if, like Wolff, they came into conflict with the State it was on account of religious and not of political matters. As far as politics are concerned, they all, practically without exception, acknowledged benevolent absolutism, even if they based their theories on the sovereignty of the people.³ The dry dogmatism of their political thought reveals the weakness of their social position. These professors of law or philosophy were not the leaders of a class but servants

¹ Gierke, *Althusius*, p. 65.

² Cf. Reiche, *Rousseau und das Naturrecht*, p. 21 ff. It is true that Law of Nature and Law of Reason were often used indiscriminately, but in the eighteenth century the latter term was preferred to denote the human character of law.

³ Cf. Landsberg, *Geschichte der deutschen Rechtswissenschaft*, iii, vol. i, p. 434.

of the princes whose interests they tried to protect even if they criticised their policy.

In this connection the influence and the importance of Rousseau in the development of German political thought can hardly be over-estimated. Rousseau was the first to assign sovereignty to the people unconditionally and to make this the point of departure for his political tenets.¹ This was a revolutionary action, as Gierke calls it, and a service of the first magnitude. Rousseau was from the outset critical of Natural Law, as is illustrated by his controversy with Diderot, when he emphasises how doubtful one must feel of the reasonableness of man and of the possibility of a law which is valid for all men.² Rousseau substitutes for abstract reason the concept of the law as the expression of a will which is general but confined to a certain community. In other words, Rousseau discovered the national community as the source of political life. Whereas the upholders of Natural Law contented themselves with criticising the legal validity of some provisions of positive law, Rousseau raised the question of validity itself, that is to say, he enquired into the reasons for political obligation.³ Man is bound to the State not because God or reason bids him to be so but because he has bound himself by the social contract. The concept of the social contract, it is true, is still a concept of Natural Law.⁴ Even if we leave out of account the question whether Rousseau held it to be an historical fact or an idea, it was in any case a concept which was to furnish the historical or logical justification for all existing or even all conceivable states. Rousseau's dependence on Natural Law further reveals itself in his adherence to the concept of a state of nature, the prerequisite of all systems of Natural Law, even if in the social contract it has become a "mere blank, the purely logical negative of the social state." Vaughan rightly points out that "by the rejection of Natural Law, by the assertion that in

¹ Gierke, loc. cit., pp. 201, 377.

² Vaughan, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 451.

³ Cf. Haymann, *Rousseau*, p. 67.

⁴ The idea of a social contract implies a Natural Law to keep contracts.

the state of nature there is no such thing as moral obligation, the contract is, in fact, discredited in advance."¹

Kant is in this respect more consistent in supposing that moral law (*Sittengesetz*) is valid in the state of nature as well. The political theory of Kant is nevertheless inconceivable without Rousseau. Kant was the first of the great German idealists who did not take over from Rousseau single catch-words, but was directly influenced by him to develop a new concept of the State which would express the needs of his class. Like Rousseau, the idealists undertook to discover the essence of political obligation. They started from the conviction that man was not only a physical being, subject to natural laws, but also a moral being subject to his conscience. Their central concept was, as with Rousseau, that of freedom, but freedom was not arbitrariness but subjection to the moral nature of man, which is governed by the moral law. Freedom is accordingly only to be found in subjection to reason, that is to say, man is free only when all his actions are determined by reason.

Both Rousseau and Kant try to find the general will which is to be binding for all. For both freedom is not the possibility of doing everything one likes, but the limitation of the empirical will. "Freedom," as Larenz puts it, "is not a quality which man has as a natural being, but a task which he sets himself as a reasonable being."² There, is however, one remarkable difference in the attitude of the two thinkers. If Rousseau talks about political freedom he means freedom in a certain political community. Kant talks about freedom as an ethical problem, the solution of which is independent of political circumstances. This difference reveals the difference in the social position of the French and the German middle class. The German thinker approaches political questions from the point of view of the professor of philosophy, Rousseau from the point of view of the leader of a class demanding actual control of the government.

It can easily be seen that Kant is more dependent on Natural

¹ Vaughan, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 440.

² *Staatsphilosophie*, p. 99.

Law than Rousseau.¹ If Rousseau talks of the general will he at least divines that this will belongs to a historic people and is the expression of existing political powers, whereas Kant's legislature of reason is abstract and not confined within national frontiers. On the other hand, Kant is less individualistic than Rousseau, since for him not the empirical individual but reason is the point of departure for political speculation. In practice, however, Kant came to purely individualistic conclusions. He is unable to keep up the distinction between the empirical and the ideal will and this accounts for the inconsistencies in his political system. His task is to find principles of law which are not derived from experience (all experience is unreliable as it cannot furnish us with generally valid rules) but are founded on reason itself. For Kant the individual fact, that which is merely empirical, is philosophically insignificant; only the universal is real. In this he followed the great philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment, Leibniz and Wolff. He thought that the chief task of the historian was to find formal principles working in history, as it was the task of the philosopher of law to discover the basis of all legal obligation. In his philosophy of jurisprudence he showed that each positive legal provision has its only *raison d'être* in its compatibility with reason.²

Kant's attempt to reduce law to formal principles illustrates the development from the mercantilist to the liberal concept of the State. The political philosophers of the mercantilist era saw in law one of the instruments for the promotion of happiness and thus justified benevolent despotism, whereas the philosopher of the liberal State is content if security is established and men are left to their conscience within the general outlines of a legal system.

It is no easy task to estimate correctly the importance of Kant in the development of political thought in Germany. He had grown up under the influence of the Enlightenment, the

¹ Cf. Dulkeit, *Naturrecht und positives Recht bei Kant*, *passim*.

² Cf. H. I. Fichte, *Ethik*, vol. i, p. 65.

English representatives of which, such as Hobbes and Hume, moulded his opinions to a great extent. His entire method of thinking was rationalist, untouched by all the tendencies which were to appear later on in the Romantic movement. Yet he stood on the threshold of a new era whose main spokesman he has influenced decisively. His critical philosophy had overcome the old dualism between object and subject, between spirit and matter, and had made the ego the creator of the world of phenomena. At the same time, however, he had excluded reality from the sphere of knowledge, by stating that the thing in itself was beyond the reach of cognition. His philosophic criticism was a great achievement and Mendelssohn praised him quite justly as the "Alleszermalmer," nor was it an exaggeration when Schlegel hailed him as the Copernicus of philosophy. It was of the highest importance that he had put an end to all uncritical dogmatism by assigning insurmountable limits to human cognition. On the other hand, his influence as a political thinker has often been strangely overrated. One of his disciples felt it necessary to protect him against the ridiculous reproach that his philosophy was responsible for the outbreak of the French Revolution. In France, he has been regarded as the responsible author of Pan-Germanism and of all evils ascribed to that creed, if not alone, at any rate in conjunction with Fichte and Hegel. In point of fact, the influence of his political writings, at least on his contemporaries, was very small. His book on perpetual peace was sold out within a few weeks of its publication and stirred up an interesting discussion, in which men like Fichte, Gentz and Schlegel joined, but it was completely forgotten only a few years later, although it contained ideas which were first to materialise in the League of Nations.¹ On the other hand, it has been asserted that his political ideas were inconsistent and bear the stamp of a decay of his intellectual powers.² Kant in fact published all

¹ Humboldt, for instance, called the book "on the whole not very important." *Correspondence with Schiller*, p. 189.

² Borries, loc. cit., pp. 9, 201. Cf. Volkelt, *Kants Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 80.

the writings in which he discussed political questions as an old man, and most of them after the French Revolution. His *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* was published, it is true, in 1784, but his treatise *Theorie und Praxis*, which contains the controversy with Hobbes, appeared in 1793; his essay on perpetual peace in 1795; and his philosophy of jurisprudence in 1797, a few years before his death. When he first discussed political problems, sixty fruitful years lay behind him¹ and neither his letters nor his great philosophic writings reveal that he had been specially interested in political questions. This, of course, is no accident. A man of the intellectual capacity of Kant does not wait sixty years before defining his attitude towards the political problems of his time if he is deeply affected by them. In reality Kant was not interested in political questions and, like most of his contemporaries, was chiefly concerned with theological, philosophic and scientific problems.² The fact that almost all his political writings were published after 1789 proves what a profound effect the French Revolution had on him. This is not surprising in a man of his intellectual importance, but it shows also that he needed a great impulse to induce him to raise his voice and to define his political attitude.

Kant was not only a typical child of the Enlightenment, he was also a characteristic representative of the middle class to which he belonged by birth and profession. As he was a clear-minded, sober thinker, the Revolution did not kindle in him that agitated enthusiasm in which many of the intellectuals of his time indulged.³ This is not strange when one considers

¹ And, as Lichtenberg puts it, "passions and opinions had lost their vigour." *Bermerkungen verschiedenen Inhalts*, Reclam edition, p. 130.

² Wasianski reports that political matters were not to be mentioned in his study, only at table could they be discussed. Wasianski, *Kant in seinen letzten Lebensjahren*, pp. 19, 20.

³ "It was," as one of his friends remarked, "the pure interest of a cosmopolitan and free-thinking philosopher who watched the experiment which was to realise the idea of a perfect constitution demanded by reason with the same pleasure as a scientist has in looking upon an experiment which is to corroborate an important hypothesis." Jachmann, *Immanuel Kant*, p. 130.

that he made the criticism of all prevailing philosophic notions the task of his life and detested dogmatism of all descriptions. He had therefore no sympathy with dogmatism of the revolutionary brand. Political radicalism, moreover, was particularly repulsive to him, the calm, almost pedantic, scholar. Yet he was youthful enough to recognise that with the French Revolution a new era had set in, though like all members of his class he did not realise that revolutionary efforts would be required in Germany to bring about that state of affairs in political life which he desired and hoped for.

How little he was in favour of political fighting, especially of resistance to the sovereign, is proved by his attitude in his conflict with the reactionary Prussian Government. On October 1, 1794, a decree of the King of Prussia was issued against him which bore the signature of the obscurantist Woellner. Kant was accused in it of having misused his philosophy to desecrate the dogmas of the Scriptures and of Christianity. The document contained a serious warning and an unmistakable threat. Kant answered this shameful decree by an apologetic letter in which he calls himself "your Royal Majesty's most faithful subject," and in which he pledges himself in future not to mention religious questions, either in his lectures or in his writings. After the death of Frederick William II, he felt himself no longer bound by this promise since it was only given by him as the subject of this king, and he published his *Contest of the Faculties*, in which he again dealt with religious questions.¹ Kant must himself have doubted the sincerity of this attitude and felt some misgivings about it, because on a slip of paper, found after his death, he had written the following note, obviously attempting a sort of justification: "If everything that you say has to be true, it is yet not your duty to tell the whole truth in public." This slip, however, also contained some words

¹ It cannot be denied that this attitude borders very close on insincerity, and Kant has often been attacked on account of it, for instance by Nicolai. His behaviour in this conflict with the State is only another proof of the crippling influence which absolutism exerted even on the greatest minds of the period.

which are nearer to what he really thought: "To deny one's inner convictions is mean."¹

It would be completely erroneous to ascribe this attitude to personal cowardice on the part of Kant. As a matter of fact, it was entirely in accordance with his political convictions, as we shall show. Besides, this attitude is only the characteristic expression of that general attitude which prevailed amongst the masses at that time and which made it impossible for them even to question the traditional forms of the political organisation. Kant had been under the direct influence of his great contemporary, Frederick II, to whom he had dedicated one of his earlier writings and whom he considered the most eminent representative of Enlightenment and benevolent despotism. He was not willing to encroach upon the sacred institution of enlightened royalty in the field of political action, at any rate not by acts which could be misunderstood as expressions of a revolutionary attitude. He had but little understanding for national and social problems, which seemed to be beyond the scope of a man who had never left his small home province and hardly even his home town. He lived, as it were, in a loftier world of thought, which had little relation to everyday life.

It was the cosmopolitan and humanitarian tendencies of the French Revolution which attracted Kant most and it was on account of his fundamental philosophic convictions that he was able to detach himself from its atrocities. The Terror, therefore, did not shock him to such a degree as it did many of his contemporaries, who were alienated from the Revolution by it. In his opinion, those accompanying circumstances of the Revolution were only accidental phenomena which had no bearing on the intrinsic essence of the Revolution. This essence of the Revolution was revealed to Kant in the light of his philosophy of history, in which he was most strongly influenced by the ideas of Enlightenment.

For Kant history was more than an enumeration of facts, or

¹ Vorländer, *Kant und Marx*, p. 9. Cf. Kant's introduction to the *Contest of the Faculties*.

an unmarshalled succession of events.¹ He was convinced of the possibility of reducing the welter of historic events to order and he achieved this order by recognising in history a secret plan of nature which guarantees a regular course.² The clue which runs through history is the law according to which all natural dispositions of men are designed to be developed completely and appropriately in the future. To make man a perfect being is accordingly the aim of history, but the individualistic character which seems to be assigned thereby to history is counterbalanced by the fact that completion cannot be reached in the individual but only in the species. Nature has endowed man with reason and thus enabled him to attain that completion. The idea of progress is an idea which Kant had adopted from the thought of the Enlightenment, but the decisive point of difference was that he no longer considered happiness but the rule of law as the aim of history. It is interesting to notice how the liberal state replaces the absolute state as the final end in the process of history.

In this concept of history, Kant differed fundamentally from Rousseau. Kant's concept of history was entirely rationalist. He believed, like Wolff, in the perfectibility of man under the guidance of reason, whereas Rousseau was imbued with a strong distrust of reason and of the achievements of the human intellect. Kant, in contradistinction to Rousseau, was convinced that men are fundamentally evil, but he reached the optimistic conclusion that the evil instinct can be checked successfully by reason. For him man was "an animal which, when it lives amongst others of its kind, must have a master."³ But, on the other hand: "Men gradually strive to leave the state of barbarity, if only they are not kept in that state by artificial means."⁴ This is the philosophic formula for the principle of progress. Kant has himself testified that he was influenced

¹ Cf. Carritt, *Morals and Politics*, p. 96.

² Cf. T. B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress*, p. 243 ff.

³ *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*, vi, Satz, Works, vol. i, p. 230. References are to the edition of the Insel Verlag, if not stated otherwise.

⁴ Works, vol. i, p. 170.

by Rousseau, that Rousseau had taught him to think better of mankind.¹ He was compelled to take this attitude, because otherwise his system of ethics would have lacked foundation. In a world which is evil by presupposition, there is obviously no room for the categorical imperative, no more than there would be room for it in a world which is wholly good. For Rousseau, at least for the Rousseau before the *Contrat Social*, man is good originally and all evils are only the consequence of civilisation. He therefore stresses the pedagogical side of the problem and is inclined to come to revolutionary conclusions. It is obvious, however, that this attitude might be equally well the point of departure for conservative as well as for revolutionary thinkers. The latter need only stress the natural equality which Rousseau asserts and he will arrive at the rights of man. The former has only to emphasise the uselessness of rational interference in the social life to arrive at an organic concept of the State and society. In fact, both types of thinkers have freely drawn from Rousseau.

According to Kant, the creation of the State as the form of civil society is not merely a problem which mankind has been given to solve, but nature has endowed man with the ability to solve it actually. "The history of mankind can be viewed as the performance of a hidden plan of nature to achieve a state which is not only inwardly but also outwardly complete and which is the only condition in which mankind can develop to the full all its qualities in the species."² In this Kant was in accord with the chief idea of Enlightenment, the rational idea of progress and of the State as a means to secure this progress. In order to perform this task, Nature avails herself of a quality of man, which is in fact an antagonism and which Kant calls the unsociable sociableness of man.³ Kant is realistic enough to take into account the fact that man shows unsocial tendencies and that selfishness and other unsocial qualities of character have

¹ *Works*, vol. viii, p. 624, ed. Hartenstein.

² *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte*, 8, Satz, vol. i, p. 235.

³ *Ibid.*, Proposition 4, *Works*, vol. i, p. 227.

played a considerable part in history. He has the profound idea that Nature makes use of these divergent tendencies. In his opinion there exists an antagonism between social and anti-social tendencies, as it were between centrifugal and centripetal forces. Nature uses this antagonism to attain her goal, the State.¹ The State is the point in which these tendencies meet. If there were no unsocial tendencies in history, mankind would never have progressed at all. It is very often the selfish and tyrannical evil-doers who have developed mankind. Without qualities of an unsocial kind "men might have led an arcadian shepherd life in complete harmony, contentment and mutual love, but in that case all their talents would have for ever remained hidden and never germinated."² If, on the other hand, there were no social forces, mankind would never have developed forms of social organisation and would have destroyed itself entirely. Kant conceived this antagonism from a purely individualistic point of view. Nevertheless, it is possible to discover in the principle of antagonism the first intimation of the Marxian theory of history as the history of class struggle.³ It is certainly the philosophic formulation of the liberal concept of society according to which there exists a prestabilised social harmony which will work itself out if the body politic is left undisturbed. Kant found this idea of evil as a social necessity in English philosophy, especially in Mandeville. He seems to have known Mandeville profoundly, as is illustrated by the fact that he uses his name in his table of categories in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. The resemblance between the two thinkers on this point is striking, when one reads the following passage taken from Mandeville: "Neither the friendly qualities and kind affections that are natural to man, nor the real virtues he is capable of acquiring by reason and self-denial are the foundations of society; but that which we call evil in this world, moral as well as natural, is the solid basis, the life

¹ "Der Mensch will Eintracht; aber die Natur weiss besser, was für seine Gattung gut ist; sie will Zwietracht." *Works*, vol. i, p. 228.

² *Ibid.*

³ Cf. Carrritt, loc. cit., p. 103.

and support of all trades and employments without exception."¹ Kant unfortunately did not pursue the idea of the "unsocial sociability" by which he tried to combine Hobbes' *bellum omnium contra omnes* with Rousseau's conviction of the goodness of men. He was too strongly under the influence of the Enlightenment to be able to turn this idea from a rational principle into an empirical criticism of actual history.² One conclusion, however, Kant draws with complete consistency. If it is the task of Nature to develop the faculties of men to the full, this development cannot come to a standstill with the modern State. A state of war, even the possibility of war, is absolutely incompatible with the idea of continuous progress. As in the state of nature the individuals endanger one another by the mere fact that they live together without laws, in the historical state, the danger consists in that the different states threaten each other until they live under a law of nations. Kant follows here the dogma put forth by Hobbes and Wolff which was generally acknowledged afterwards, that states stand in the relation of the state of nature to one another. Kant, however, points out that even in the state of nature moral duties exist, since moral law is valid also in the state of nature. The goal of a perpetual peace is a postulate of pure reason, whose realisation must be aspired to even when it cannot be attained. Kant already demands perpetual peace in his treatise on history. In his work *On Perpetual Peace* he outlines the philosophic rules for a league of nations as the indispensable presupposition for a lasting peace. In this work he raises such modern demands as complete disarmament and abolition of standing armies.

Kant's treatise on peace is the most important of his political writings, and the best known outside Germany.³ In none of his other writings did he stress so much the dependence of politics

¹ *Fable of the Bees*, vol. i, p. 369.

² How rationalistic his concept of history was, is illustrated by the fact that he considered "das Mittelalter als eine unbegreifliche Verirrung des menschlichen Geistes." *Works*, vol. i, p. 64.

³ Cf. Miss Campbell Smith's introduction to her edition of Kant's *Perpetual Peace*.

on morals. In none did he deal so clearly with practical political questions. As a philosopher he feels himself responsible for politics and he demands therefore that the kings, even if they need not be philosophers as Plato would have it, must at least consult philosophers in affairs of state.¹ His task in this essay is to work out an ideal treaty of peace, with conditions to guarantee its continuance. In such an ideal treaty, which he wanted to be the model for all treaties to be concluded, there must be, above all, no secret reservations which might furnish cause for a new war. In it the right of free determination must be acknowledged and no country should be given to alien rulers by any legal procedure.² "No state shall violently interfere with the constitution and administration of another."³

Kant is compelled to acknowledge that wars are inevitable as long as the nations stand in the relation of the state of nature to each other. But he demands that in these wars no means should be employed which violate the acknowledged principles of humanity. "No state in war shall avail itself of hostile actions which would make mutual confidence in the future peace impossible, such as abetting, assassination, poisoning, breach of capitulation and treason."⁴ There is no doubt that Kant would have looked with horror on modern warfare with its gas attacks and air raids involving women and children.

Almost all thinkers of the Enlightenment were hostile to war, as it is incompatible with the concept of the rule of reason and absolutely inconsistent with the idea of a Natural Law. Yet more than a hundred years were to pass till Kant's vision of a league of nations was to some extent realised.

Kant never dealt with economics systematically, but in this treatise he shows a deep insight into some of its problems. He demands the prohibition of all loans for purposes of war, since

¹ *Works*, vol. v, p. 690.

² Kant, however, thinking of the partition of Poland, is anxious to make it clear that he does not want to alter the *status quo*. Only for future occasions shall the principle hold good. *Works*, vol. v, p. 664.

³ *Perpetual Peace*, i, § 5.

⁴ *Works*, vol. v, p. 663, cf. also *Metaphysik der Sitten*, § 57.

the accumulation of such debts might easily lead to war. It is on this account that he criticises the financial policy of England¹ without mentioning it by name.

Two further points are of lasting importance in connection with Kant's treatise on perpetual peace. Firstly, it must be remembered that perpetual peace and a league of nations as the means to its realisation are not treated as a Utopia, but as an ideal the realisation of which mankind has to attempt. Perpetual peace, therefore, is not only a postulate of reason but also a question of practical politics. Secondly, it must be borne in mind that Kant maintains that only states which were republics would ensure peace. He understands, with Rousseau, by republic a state in which the idea of law is valid, more precisely in which the principles of freedom and equality prevail.² The contrast to his republic is not monarchy but despotism. Here we touch upon the core of his political convictions. We have seen already that Kant was no revolutionary. He was no democrat either and he even considered democracy the worst of all forms of government. His chief aim was to outline a political philosophy in which the obvious dangers of an unlimited despotism, so amply experienced in those days, could be avoided and the middle class could find sufficient scope for their economic and cultural activities. The roots of this doctrine are to be found in his ethics, especially in his conviction of the moral value of man, which is destroyed in a despotic government. "Do not make thyself a mere means for the use of others, but be to them likewise an end."³ Under the system of absolutism, man was used as a means for the sovereign and absolutism was therefore ethically unjustifiable. We must, however, bear in mind that when Kant denounced absolutism he did not mean the enlightened government of Frederick the Great.

¹ "Die sinnreiche Erfindung eines handeltreibenden Volks in diesem Jahrhundert," *Works*, vol. v, p. 662.

² Cf. *Works*, vol. v, p. 666. "All lawful governments are republican." Rousseau, *Social Contract*, book ii, ch. 6.

³ In order to understand this sentence we must lay particular stress on the word "mere," since, as Professor Laird points out, men are inevitably often used as means. *An Enquiry into Moral Notions*, p. 139.

As Newton had discovered general laws for nature, so Kant endeavoured to find general laws of reason for human, particularly social, actions, and to reduce these laws to some universally valid principles. The task was, as it were, to discover the law of gravitation for society. "The science of the laws which are valid for nature is physics, the science of the laws of freedom is ethics."¹ In this respect Kant was in keeping with the tendency of Enlightenment to generalise and simplify.

Kant's system of ethics can only be understood if it is contrasted with the doctrines which prevailed in the eighteenth century. The thinkers of the age of Enlightenment tried to establish ethical obligations by relating them to the ideals of happiness and perfection. In their opinion he acts rightly who promotes happiness and perfection by his actions. This, for instance, was the gist of Wolff's ethical theory. Kant believed that such ethics were unscientific, and he even had a shrewd suspicion that they could be used for the justification of absolutism, as indeed they were. He endeavoured to plant ethical obligations on firmer ground and tried to find a scientific principle which could be applied as a criterion to all human actions. As he had found "formal" categories without which no cognition is possible, so he wanted to establish a formal principle by which all actions could be judged scientifically. This principle was of necessity formal since the introduction of material values into the system of ethics implies an empirical element which excludes general validity.

The fundamental concept of Kant's ethical system is the categorical imperative: "Act according to a maxim which can be adopted at the same time as a universal law."² In this principle Kant expresses what he calls the autonomy of the will. "Autonomy is that quality of the will by which the will gives laws unto itself."³ The criterion which the will applies when it gives laws is whether this law could be a general law. It seems as if this would introduce a hopelessly individualistic

¹ *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*, *Works*, vol. v, p. 9.

² *Works*, vol. v, p. 329.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. v, p. 73.

and subjective element into the system of law. This is counterbalanced by the fact that reason, according to which man acts, is in Kant's opinion not a capacity of the individual but an idea which has objective validity. In other words, Kant presupposed that the individual when he applies laws to his actions uses standards which are generally acknowledged. It must, however, be admitted that Kant by no means overcame the difficulty which lies in the fact that there are no conceivable criteria for the coincidence between reason, as the ideal will, and the actions of the empirical individual.

The categorical imperative in plain language is the simple ethical principle which forbids man to do something which he does not want somebody to do to him. This is perhaps the best expression of the bourgeois attitude according to which society is an agglomeration of individuals whose chief interest it is to live in peace and to be left in peace. Kant did not realise that by introducing the categorical imperative as the fundamental ethical principle he presupposed the bourgeois society which he purported to explain.

Kant devoted much energy to the attempt to distinguish between law and ethics. In order to understand the significance of this attempt we must bear in mind that the modern state necessitated a social organisation which was ordered by law but in which the individual was left as much scope as possible. Law and ethics were bound to be separated as soon as the unanimity with respect to ethical values which had characterised the Middle Ages had disappeared.

Kant's distinction between law and ethics again is purely formal. Jurisprudence as the science of law is the system of duties which oblige men to let their will be determined by the will of others according to the principle of freedom, that is to say, law is the system of commands which regulate our social relations so that nobody is interfered with more than is necessary to maintain freedom. Ethics, on the other hand, is concerned with duties in so far as the individual is determined purely by his own will. Both law and ethics, however, belong

to ethics in its wider sense as the system of duties and for both of them the categorical imperative and the principle of autonomy are valid. Ethics require that man acts from a sense of duty, whereas law only requires that he acts according to duty whatever his motives may be.

The actions of man as a member of the social organisation which is governed by law are only part of his activity. Law is only a part of ethics in its wider sense and both are characterised by general "norms." Law is distinguished from ethics proper only in that it has to deal with "outward" actions, while ethics proper appeal to the frame of mind in which man acts. "The legislation which makes an action a duty and this duty at the same time a motive, is ethical. The legislation which does not include the motive principle in the law and consequently admits another motive than the idea of duty itself is juridical."¹ Law therefore requires comparatively little from man. It only demands obedience to the law or rather conformity with its commands without considering from what motives man obeys. In other words, law presupposes only a minimum of morality. This is entirely in keeping with Kant's general scepticism concerning human nature and leads him to the conviction that even "a people of devils" could organise a state.

Kant's attempt to draw the dividing line between law and ethics has often been ridiculed and is indeed open to criticism.² It was, nevertheless, a fruitful attempt to classify human behaviour and it expressed the fundamental change through which society had passed. Mediaeval society was held together by a unity of valuation which modern society has lost altogether. Modern society required a liberty of initiative and an independence of moral and religious standards which was

¹ *Einführung in die Metaphysik der Sitten*, *Works*, vol. v, pp. 316, 322. This distinction is almost identical with that made by the teachers of Natural Law between enforceable and unenforceable obligations. Only legal obligations can be enforced, whereas nobody can be forced to act in a certain frame of mind.

² Cf. Metzger, *Gesellschaft, Staat und Recht in der Ethik des deutschen Idealismus*, p. 62 ff.

unheard of in a society governed by rigid beliefs and organised in forms of common activity. Kant's distinction between law and ethics was merely the philosophic formulation of a prevailing desire to refute the omnipotence of religious and ethical values over men and to establish the free initiative of the individual who, except for a minimum of legal interference, could go on building up the industrial society of the future.

Kant, however, does not content himself with defining law as a system of rules which regulate the "outward" behaviour of man. He endeavours to penetrate deeper into the essence of the legal obligation, since law and ethics are parts of a greater whole. So far he is in complete agreement with the teachers of Natural Law who had also attempted to find a deeper legitimization for positive law. "A mere empirical jurisprudence," Kant wrote contemptuously, "which is concerned with laws only as social facts is like the wooden head in the fable of Phaedrus which may be beautiful but has unfortunately no brains."¹

The criterion of the laws is not whether they promote the happiness of man but whether they are consistent with reason. Morals is the science which teaches not how we shall be happy but how we shall be worthy of happiness.² In this Kant differs from Rousseau, who endeavoured to show that it was in the real interest of man to obey the law. "The point is not to teach me what is just, but to show me what interest I have in being just."³ Kant was very scornful of such an attempt to base a philosophy of right on the selfishness of man; he was convinced that the principle of happiness creates only mischief in political history and that mankind will not find peace till the principle of disinterested obedience to the moral law is recognised as the ethical basis of any legal obligation.⁴

It is open to question whether such rigorous ethics do not

¹ *Works*, vol. v, p. 335.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 179.

³ First draft of the *Contrat Social*, Vaughan, vol. i, p. 452.

⁴ "The sovereign wants to make the people happy according to his ideas (of happiness), and becomes a despot; the people do not want to give up the general claim to their own happiness, and become rebels." *Works*, vol. i, p. 207.

make all human activity impossible. This has been pointed out by Schiller, who was otherwise an enthusiastic Kantian. It makes too great a demand on man to expect him to disregard his personal happiness so entirely. It is strange that Kant, who in his philosophy of history has assigned to evil its place in the development of mankind, abstracts so much from reality in this instance.¹

In accordance with his concept of law as a system of duties, Kant applies the principle of the categorical imperative to legal duties as well. "Law comprehends the whole of the conditions under which the voluntary actions of any one person can be harmonised in reality with the voluntary actions of any other person, according to a universal law of freedom."² It can easily be seen that the value of this definition depends on the question what exactly does Kant mean by freedom? The prevailing doctrine had followed Montesquieu in defining freedom as the exercise of the free will.³ Johannes von Müller, for instance, defined freedom as the capacity for doing everything that one wished to do.⁴ Kant attempts to determine this fundamental concept of political theory more exactly. It is significant that for him the problem of freedom as a political problem determining the relation of men to one another and the relation between State and individual does not exist. Freedom is an idea of pure reason,⁵ it is a concept which cannot be demonstrated in reality but which we must simply presuppose if we assume the existence of moral law. Kant pertinently points out that a fatalistic concept of ethics excludes the very notion of obligation since the latter presupposes that man can act otherwise than he actually does. The gist of Kant's doctrine of freedom, which cannot be treated here at length, is that freedom is, because it ought to be. Freedom has two sides, a

¹ Kant realised this difficulty himself and admitted that man need not give up the idea of happiness entirely, demanding only that this idea must not be made the condition for his actions. *Works*, vol. i, p. 179.

² *Ibid.*, vol. v, p. 335.

³ "La liberté philosophique consiste dans l'exercice de la volonté ou du moins dans l'opinion où l'on est, que l'on exerce sa volonté." *Esprit des Lois XI.*

⁴ *Der Fürstenbund*, p. 1.

⁵ *Works*, vol. v, p. 325.

negative one according to which man is free if his action is not determined by his sensual desires or other empirical stimuli, and a positive one according to which he is free if he is determined by the categorical imperative as the chief principle of moral law. It has been pointed out that this doctrine leads nowhere, since it assumes that the acting individual knows whether the principle according to which he acts can form the principle for a general ethical legislation.

As in his ethics Kant presupposed a society of saints or at least of professors of moral philosophy, so in his political philosophy he presupposed a society of sober and virtuous citizens who want to be law-abiding members of the commonwealth. It is the political philosophy of an honest but narrow-minded bourgeois.¹ How far Kant's political doctrine was in reality the elaborate transcription of his distrust of the absolutist system is revealed in a passage in which he talked about political freedom as a social problem. In this passage which he never published during his lifetime, he described as the essence of freedom that each citizen must be allowed to seek his welfare in his own manner and that the State should under no circumstances use him as a means even for the furtherance of his own happiness.² In other words, Kant expressed the conviction that the citizens, if left free, would best realise a state of justice.

The fundamental principle of his legal theory is the autonomy of the will in which freedom ultimately consists. The chief object of law is to guarantee the peaceful coexistence of men in a certain social order which Kant naïvely presupposes. The member of this society of virtuous burghers acts lawfully if he respects the laws which make it possible that each individual has as much autonomy as possible.

Kant attempted several times to define freedom satisfactorily. He was confronted with the intricate problem how to combine the autonomy of the will which he asserted with the principle of coercion which, as he well knew, is an indispensable characteristic of law. The categorical imperative tells man to act

¹ Metzger, loc. cit., p. 80.

² Reicke, *Lose Blätter*, C. 15.

according to laws without which the whole social order would break down and no freedom would be possible, and it is appropriate to say that men are free if they submit to their commands voluntarily, but this does not alter the fact that very often they must be actually compelled to obedience. Does compulsion not make the will necessarily heteronomous? Kant did not solve this problem. He attempted in vain to overcome the contradiction by identifying law and compulsion. In his logical and formal way he defined compulsion as the hindrance of a hindrance to freedom, that is to say, he tried to evade the problem by turning a political question into a logical one.¹ According to him, reason does not only require law, but it also requires compulsion in order to realise law. This, however, is only a fiction which does not alter the fact that compulsion is something coming from the outside and that the compelled individual is not free. Kant could not solve the problem of the relation between compulsion and will because his philosophy of jurisprudence is founded on the abstract notion of reason and the problem of law cannot be solved from this side. Law as a social phenomenon, as the regulation of the social powers in the interests of those who can force their will on the community, was wholly unknown to him.

In *Theory and Practice* Kant defined freedom as follows: "Nobody can compel me to be happy in one way, but everybody may seek his happiness in that way which he considers best, so long as he does not interfere with the freedom of another to aspire to similar ends which can coexist with the freedom of everybody according to a universal law."² One may note that in this "definition" the term freedom, which is to be defined, occurs twice. In fact, this definition is a mere tautology. Freedom is that which is consistent with freedom. The real problem begins exactly at the point at which Kant stops. The decisive question is: How far can the will of the individual go, without interfering with the sphere of freedom of another person?

¹ *Works*, vol. v, p. 337

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 193.

Kant realised this himself, and in his *Metaphysics of Morals* he attempted another definition. According to this, the essence of freedom is that we obey only laws to which we would have given assent if we had been asked to do so. This explanation also is formal, and is nothing but the application of the principle of autonomy. Kant falls back with this definition on Rousseau's concept of freedom. "L'impulsion du seul appétit est esclavage, et l'obéissance à la loi qu'on s'est prescrite est liberté."¹ Rousseau, however, was more consistent than Kant, since he, on account of this opinion, repudiated the principle of representation to which Kant clung.²

In one point Kant came nearer to the truth than Rousseau. Like the latter, he maintained the idea of an original social contract which in his opinion is the source and criterion of law. Whereas Rousseau was in doubt as to the character of this contract, or at any rate never stated clearly whether it was an historic fact or a mere hypothesis,³ Kant denies the historic character of the social contract unmistakably.⁴ According to him it is an idea of reason,⁵ a mere "auxiliary construc-

¹ *C.S.*, I, 8.

² Cf. Rousseau: "La souveraineté ne peut être représentée, par la même raison qu'elle ne peut être aliénée." *C.S.*, III, 15. With Kant: "Alle wahre Republik ist und kann nichts anders sein, als ein repräsentatives System des Volks, um im Namen desselben, durch alle Staatsbürger vereinigt, vermittelst ihrer Abgeordneten (Deputierten) ihre Rechte zu besorgen." *Rechtslehre*, § 52.

³ Cf. Liepmann, loc. cit., p. 194, Vaughan, loc. cit., vol. I, p. 438.

⁴ It has been claimed that Kant was the first thinker to state this clearly (cf. Gierke, *Althusius*, p. 382, and M. Salomon in *Archiv für öffentliches Recht*, vol. xxviii, pp. 99-103), but Hume held quite similar views. See *Of the Original Contract*, The New Universal Library, p. 324. There is a passage in the first draft of the *Social Contract* which seems to indicate that Rousseau considered the original contract as purely hypothetical. "Il y a mille manières de rassembler les hommes, il n'y en a qu'une de les unir. C'est pour cela que je ne donne dans cette ouvrage qu'une méthode pour la formation des sociétés politiques, quoique, dans la multitude d'agréations qui existent actuellement sous ce nom, il n'y en est peut-être pas deux qui aient été formées de la même manière et pas une qui l'ait été selon celle que j'établi. Mais je cherche le droit et la raison, et ne dispute pas des faits." I, ch. v. But this passage is contradicted by others in which Rousseau treats the contract as an historical phenomenon, see, e.g., IV, ch. ii.

⁵ *Works*, vol. V, p. 436, and vol. I, p. 201.

tion." "The act by which a people is represented as constituting itself into a State is termed the original contract." The legislator therefore has to enquire as to whether the laws are compatible with the idea of an original contract, whether they can be regarded as issued by the whole people. In the idea of the original contract, it is again the principle of autonomy which constitutes the essence of political obligation, that is to say, the people are obliged to obey the laws which conform to the social contract since they are supposed to be parties to this contract.

Since Kant did not consider the state of nature as an historical state, he was not interested in describing it, any more than he was interested in the question how the modern state has originated and historically developed. There are, however, passages in which Kant seems to treat the state of nature as an empirical phenomenon.¹ We read, for instance, in *The Metaphysics of Morals*, "And thus it is not to be said that the individual in the State has sacrificed a part of his inborn external freedom for a particular purpose; but he has abandoned his wild lawless freedom wholly, in order to find all his proper freedom again, entire and undiminished, but in the form of regulated order of dependence, that is, in a civil State regulated by rules of law."² This is almost identical with Rousseau's famous words: "Ce que l'homme perd par le contrat social c'est sa liberté naturelle et un droit illimité à tout ce qui le tente et qu'il peut atteindre; ce qu'il gagne c'est la liberté civile et la propriété de tout ce qu'il possède."³ Here Kant and Rousseau do not use the language of fiction, but speak of the individual as having actually abandoned his *status naturalis*.

Like Rousseau, Kant considered the *status civilis* as the transformation of the *status naturalis*, and he was willing to acknowledge, as we have already noticed, that the latter was not merely a void but a state in which the moral law was valid. That is to say, he clearly distinguished between society as *status naturalis* and State as *status civilis*, whereas for Hobbes,

¹ Works, vol. v, p. 376.

² Ibid., p. 436.

³ C.S., book 1, ch. 8.

for instance, society did not exist apart from the State. For Hobbes the State was created out of conditions which were from a legal and ethical point of view a void.

Thus we come to the important question: what meaning has the State in the political system of Kant? We have seen that Kant in his treatise on history considered the State the highest goal of mankind. This is an idea which later Hegel was to adopt and to develop. Kant, however, very soon gave it up. He was very far from glorifying the State, which had had such small significance during the whole of the eighteenth century, to which Kant essentially belonged. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* he contents himself with defining the State as the union of a number of men under laws, that is to say, the State is merely one of the numerous associations which society forms to realise its purposes.¹ We see clearly that the national idea which a few decades later was to become one of the main problems of European political thought is not even hinted at here. For Kant the State is a postulate of reason, not the incarnation of the national forces of a people. It has not, as it was to be later with Hegel, a value in itself; for him it is nothing but the basis which must be provided in order that the morality of the citizens may develop itself. In some of his works, however, we can discover the first intimations of the organic ideal of the State which was to replace the purely rationalist one of the Enlightenment.² In his theory of the State as the indispensable basis of freedom, and in his radical refutation of utilitarianism, there was already to be found the germ of a new political philosophy, which was to ascribe to the State a higher dignity than that of a loose confederation of frightened individuals.³

¹ *Works*, vol. v, p. 433.

² He defines the State in the *Critique of Judgment* as "a body in which the single member is not merely a means but at the same time also an end and, by collaborating in making the whole possible, is himself determined by the idea of the whole as far as his place and functions are concerned." *Works*, ed. Hartenstein, vol. vii, p. 247.

³ Cf. the following characteristic passage: "The Constitution is fundamentally based on the morality of the people and morality in turn cannot properly take root without a good Constitution." Reicke, loc. cit., F. 15.

As far as the organisation of the State is concerned, Kant follows partly the teachings of Montesquieu, partly those of Rousseau. Like Rousseau he clings to the principle of the sovereignty of the people by maintaining that, in view of the social contract, the united people itself is the head of the State (Staatsoberhaupt) and the prince only an organ of the people.¹ Like Montesquieu he assumes three powers: the legislature, the executive and the judicature. To what extent Kant still thought in the terms of rationalism is shown by the fact that he compares these three powers to a syllogism.² According to him these powers must be clearly separated from each other. The legislative power can only belong to the people in their totality, because, according to the saying *Volenti non fit iniuria*, only thus can injustice be avoided and the will of the united people is the source of law. "Hence it is only the united and consenting will of all the people that ought to have the power of enacting law in the State."³

It is precisely at this "ought" that Kant halted. From here to a truly democratic ideology it was only one step, which Kant was not willing to take. If he had taken it, he would have realised that the gulf between personal will and compulsion can be bridged only by granting the people the right to control those who actually compel them. Kant was not aware of the fact that when he talked of the "united and consenting" will of the people he no longer meant the ideal will which is tantamount to reason but the actual will with its conflicting interests.

He acquiesces in the fact that the laws are not issued by the people but by the princes or other independent organs. He maintains his principle of the original contract only by demanding that laws must possess such a content as they would have had if they had been issued by the whole people. But who guarantees that this is the case? Who protects the rights of the people against the rulers? This is the fundamental problem of political theory, with which thinkers have struggled again

¹ *Metaphysik der Sitten, Rechtslehre*, § 47.

² *Works*, vol. v, p. 434.

³ *Ibid.*

and again. Kant gives no answer to this question. He, moreover, declares with determination that the people have no rights against their rulers. He especially denies them the right of resistance against unlawful actions of the princes, a right which thinkers such as Locke and Sydney had granted them.¹ "The ruler has only rights against the subject, no duties."² Even if an alteration of the defective constitution is necessary, such change ought only to proceed from the sovereign power by way of reform and is not to be brought about by the people by way of revolution.³ In his eyes an insurrection is always a crime whatever may be its aims. This means in fact a wholesale refutation of the French Revolution. The reason which Kant gives for this attitude is by no means convincing. He is afraid that through revolution the idea of law itself would be destroyed irreparably. This is all the more strange, as Kant himself admits that the revolutionary of to-day might be the law-giver of to-morrow. Besides, he himself had hailed the French Revolution as a mark of the progress of mankind.⁴ "When a revolution has once succeeded and established a new constitution, the unlawfulness of its beginning and continuance cannot exempt the individuals from the obligation of complying with the new state of affairs. They cannot logically refuse that authority which is now in power."⁵ This utterance, however, is sharply contradicted in another passage in which Kant expresses his doubt whether revolutions ever bring about true and lasting reforms. Even the most faithful disciples of Kant did not follow him in this. Thus one of them wrote, "If a government in a state sinks so low that it perverts all right and destroys all the inalienable faculties of humanity, then the civil bond is broken by the ruler himself."⁶

¹ For Rousseau the problem of resistance had no significance, since the sovereign is the general will, which is always right. Kant denies the right of resistance because he believes that sovereignty rests with the people. Cf. Gurwitsch, *das Revolutionsproblem*, p. 16. ² *Works*, vol. v, p. 440.

³ The individual has, to use a term of Natural Law, an *obligatio ad patiendum iniurias*. ⁴ *Works*, vol. i, p. 638. ⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. v, p. 444.

⁶ I. H. Tieftrunk, *Philosophische Untersuchungen über das private und öffentliche Recht*, 1797-98, vol. ii, p. 366. Cf. also Jacob's *Antimachiavelli*. Halle, 1796.

Kant's attitude towards the question of resistance has been explained by the suggestion that on religious grounds he considered rebellion against the ruler impossible. It has been pointed out that Kant was in his youth under pietistic influences. This explanation does not carry much weight, as it was the pietist most of all who claimed the right of the individual against the absolute rule of the prince. Kant's attitude towards the question of resistance is an interesting example of that discrepancy between theory and practice to which we have already drawn attention. Rebellion belongs to the sphere of facts and can hardly be harmonised with the idea of pure reason. Moreover, most revolutions have been carried out by men who claimed to make their compatriots happy. That is why the right to violent resistance is rejected by Kant.¹ Nevertheless, it remains strange that Kant, although he realised that the legislation of reason cannot always be enforced, did not draw the obvious conclusions from this. This, of course, is to be explained by his political experiences. He had never come into violent conflict with a tyrannical ruler, and he believed apparently that a peaceful appeal to the Government would in the long run succeed better than violence, at any rate, that the damage done by violence would be greater than that created by injustice. When he turns against violence he is trying to raise barriers against the French Revolution and to spare Germany the fate which the Revolution had brought on France. Kant's attitude towards the question of resistance shows us how right he was when he described the German nation as the one which more easily than any other civilised nation obeys the Government under which it happens to be.²

Kant's wavering attitude towards the Revolution can be only fully understood when he is considered as a representative of his class. This class demanded protection against the arbitrariness of the absolute prince and was therefore in favour of a

¹ Kant asserts that reason requires "der jetzt bestehenden gesetzgebenden Gewalt gehorchen zu sollen, ihr Ursprung mag sein, welcher er wolle," *Works*, vol. v, p. 440.

² *Anthropologie*, § 87, *Works*, ed. Hartenstein, vol. 10, p. 356.

Constitution which limited the rights of the ruler to some extent. This idea of the "Rechtsstaat" (the State subject to the rule of law) was to become the chief claim of the middle class during the nineteenth century. The main characteristic of the "Rechtsstaat" was the notion of law as a general norm which was applied without discrimination and which excluded arbitrariness. In one of his unpublished writings, Kant has formulated this principle very clearly. "Civil liberty is that condition in which nobody is obliged to obey anything else but that which is decreed by law. . . . Nobody can be forced to do or to forgo anything by a particular decree which is not a law as it is not universal in its aim."¹ On the other hand, these professors, writers and burghers did not yet feel strong enough to demand their right radically and were too much intimidated by the established social organisation to be consistent. Nor had they developed a sufficient sense of their social status to have faith in their political strength.

The question of resistance occupied the minds of Kant's contemporaries a great deal. The illustrious lawyer, Feuerbach, devoted a youthful work to it, *Anti-Hobbes*, in which he acknowledged a limited right of resistance.² This treatise is significant for the political thought of the period in its complete remoteness from practical life. It contains a controversy with L. H. Jacob, who had taught that resistance to rulers was justifiable if the ruler carried out acts which could not be justified by the ends of the State, that is, could not be conceived as being in the public interest and were therefore purely private. According to Jacob, a prince does wrong, for instance, if he issues the order that every citizen has to raise his hat and to scratch his ear every morning at twelve o'clock. Feuerbach takes the trouble to prove that even such an order could be compatible with the end of the State, as it could serve to show a neighbouring country national unity and resolve. Nothing shows more clearly than

¹ Reicke, *Lose Blätter*, F. 13.

² P. J. A. Feuerbach, *Anti-Hobbes oder über die Grenzen der höchsten Gewalt und das Zwangsrecht der Bürger gegen den Oberherrn*, 1798

this controversy how little even political thinkers concerned themselves with the really important issues of the time.

In another respect also, Kant is a typical representative of his class. In his treatise on Theory and Practice he had already demanded equality as a necessary characteristic of a republican state. He defines equality as follows: "Each member of the community has enforceable rights against any other from which only the sovereign is exempted."¹ His concept of equality is, like his concept of freedom, purely formal.² There is, according to him, only an equality before the law, not *de facto*. This equality is compatible with the greatest inequality as far as property is concerned. Kant, it is true, demands consistently that all privileges, especially those of the nobility, ought to be abolished and he is in favour of abolishing the institution of serfdom.³ In raising this claim he was in accord with a demand generally raised by the middle class, as we have already shown. Equality for him is fundamentally equality of opportunity, not equality of status. The whole field of cultural activity ought to be open to everybody, regardless of his social position. This is another of the fundamental political claims of liberalism which we find in almost all Constitutions of the nineteenth century, and which was expressed in the French Constitution of 1791 as follows: "Tous les citoyens sont également admissibles à toute dignité, place et emploi publique, selon leur capacité et sans autre distinction que celle de leur vertu et de leur talent." And yet Kant was so much steeped in the idea of the absolutist state that he does not carry out the notion of equality consistently. The principle of equality is not valid for all, but only for the economically independent male citizens, such as landowners, free farmers, artisans, merchants, learned men and officials. The women and the dependent members of the community are not fully qualified citizens.⁴ In this sense everybody is dependent whose economic existence is dependent on

¹ *Works*, vol. i, p. 194.

² Cf. *Works*, vol. v, pp. 344, 667.

³ *Theorie und Praxis*, *Works*, vol. i, p. 195.

⁴ *Anfangsgründe der Rechtslehre*, § 46, *Works*, vol. v, p. 435.

the will of somebody else, as, for instance, all servants.¹ "A servant is a being who, like a parasitical plant, is rooted in other men."² Only the citizen who is qualified by property has the right to vote. If Kant talks of property he means in the first place landed property. "The landed proprietors are the essential subjects of the State, since they are connected with the soil *vitam sustinendo*."³ In this attitude of Kant's the conflicts between the third and fourth estate which are to play so considerable a part in the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are already foreshadowed.

In his views on property Kant is most clearly a representative of the economic beliefs and interests of the middle class. He found, as it were, property as a social reality and he has not the slightest doubts as to its justification. It is well known that Rousseau, although he clung to the principle of private property as "*le plus sacré de tous les droits des citoyens*," has a keen insight into the injustices of the existing economic order. Some formulations, for instance in the *Treatise on Inequality*, read as if they were written by a modern socialist.⁴ Rousseau also realises that property has its *raison d'être* in the State and is subject to it.⁵ He is at least in favour of measures by which the prevailing inequality should be mitigated.⁶ Kant accepts wholeheartedly the existing social order and bases property entirely on the act of occupation. The function of the State accordingly is to protect property.⁷ Rousseau was aware that the historic origin of property was the "right" of the stronger, that is to say, pure force. He tried to limit this right by demanding that nobody

¹ All the Constitutions of the French Revolution excluded servants from the electorate.

² Reicke, *LOSE Blätter*, F. 21.

³ Reicke, F. 21.

⁴ "Le premier qui ayant enclos un terrain s'avisa de dire, Ceci est à moi, et trouva des gens assez simples pour le croire, fut le vrai fondateur de la société civile." Vaughan, *Rousseau*, vol. i, p. 169. Cf. also *Economie politique*, ibid. p. 268; *Projet de Constitution pour la Corse*: "Je veux, en un mot, que la propriété de l'Etat soit aussi grande, aussi forte, et celle des citoyens aussi petite, aussi faible, qu'il est possible." Vaughan, vol. ii, p. 337.

⁵ *Contrat Social*, book i, ch. 9.

⁶ Cf. Sée, *L'Evolution de la Pensée Politique en France au XVIII Siècle*, p. 307.

⁷ *Works*, vol. v, p. 374.

may occupy more than he needs to satisfy his wants, and by maintaining that mere occupation without actually working on the land is no legitimate title.¹ Kant recognises no such limitations. "What I bring into my possession in accordance with law, and what I will to be mine, that becomes my property."² This in fact is the economic theory of capitalism. One of the essential traits of modern capitalism is the transformation of all economic-ethical relations into purely economic-legal ones on the analogy of the property relation. The feudal vassal, for instance, owed loyalty to his overlord, the modern citizen owes to the State his taxes. Kant clearly anticipated this development by constructing even such relations as those between husband and wife and between father and son in terms of proprietorship.³

Kant's attitude towards the problem of property and his defence of the class system are striking examples of the essential dependence of political philosophy on the economic foundations of society. It was clearly impossible on Kant's own premises to justify the institution of private property in philosophic terms. It is very difficult to understand what exactly Kant meant by reason, but it is evident that private property is not a postulate of reason but a social institution developed by men in a very definite historical process. In fact Kant is forced to admit that fundamentally the right to property is founded on sheer violence although he does not draw from this the same conclusions as did Rousseau. He attacked serfdom and defended the exclusion of the un-propertied members of society from all essential political rights almost in the same breath, in both cases in the name of reason. This shows that he was unconsciously bound by the economic necessities of his class which needed free labour but wanted the institution of private property. The social development went in the direction of economic liberty and of a political organisation in which human activity was secured under the rule of law and in which the decisions

¹ *Contrat Social*, i, ch. 9.

² *Works*, vol. v, p. 375.

³ Cf. Metzger, loc. cit., p. 92.

of the authorities could be predicted with some degree of certainty. Kant's thought indicated this direction and furnished his class with a rationalisation for their social demands. There can be no doubt that he was also instrumental in bringing about the new legal order which suited the economic interests and tendencies of the middle classes which had already begun to shake off the fetters of mercantilism.

In his effort to secure the free activity of the individuals, Kant demanded with determination the freedom of the Press, a demand which again is one of the chief claims of liberalism. The people have not the right to punish a prince who is unfaithful to the Constitution, or to resist him violently, but they are permitted to discuss his measures in public and to criticise him. The freedom of the Press is according to Kant the palladium of liberty, in fact the only palladium available.¹ Kant was not only a loyal citizen, he was also an enlightened intellectual. He believes, as all liberals will do, in the value of arguments, since he believes in reason. His belief in progress is unshakable. "All round us is evidence that mankind as a whole has made considerable moral progress in our age as compared with former ages, and the cry of increasing degeneration arises from the fact that we stand on a higher platform of morality, whence we can look further ahead and judge more severely the difference between what we are and what we should be."² He ridicules the belief of so many of his contemporaries that the people are not ripe for liberty and points out that the people must be free first before we can judge whether they can use their freedom properly.

In his treatise "Answer to the question: What is Enlightenment" he had stated that his age, if not an enlightened one, was at least an age in the process of enlightenment, and he gave expression to the hope that enlightenment would reach all thrones.³ *Sapere aude* was the slogan of Enlightenment, which Kant translates "have the courage to avail yourself of your

¹ *Theorie und Praxis*, Works, vol. i, p. 209.

² Ibid., Works, vol. i, p. 216.

³ Works, vol. i, p. 168.

reason.”¹ It was fifty years before the people in Germany went on the barricades and had the courage to use other weapons to enforce their rights.

Kant’s lasting merit in the history of political thought lies in the emphasis which he laid upon the idea of the State subject to the rule of law, and in his clear realisation that the chief task of the State was to secure justice.² In these points Kant was strongly under the influence of Rousseau. In all the writings of Rousseau we find the glorification of law as “the chief triumph of human wisdom and foresight.” After Kant, the idea of the State subject to the rule of law never disappeared from German political theory until it was dismissed as a liberal aberration by the present rulers of Germany. Kant gave this idea its classical formulation in his philosophy of Jurisprudence: “In the union of the three powers consists the welfare of the State (*salus republicae suprema lex est*), whereby one is not to understand the welfare and happiness of the citizens, because this can be achieved also in the state of nature, or under a despotic government, perhaps even more comfortably and desirably; but the state of the greatest coincidence of the constitution with the principles of justice to which reason obliges us to aspire by a categorical imperative.”³ This was the ideal of the middle class who wanted a state of justice by which they understood a state which maintained order and secured property.

Kant was too much a thinker of the Enlightenment to realise that the State was more than a legal organisation, that it was in reality the expression of irrational and imponderable powers, but by denying that selfishness was the primary driving force of man as a political being he paved the way for

¹ *Works*, vol. i, p. 163.

² Cf. the following passage which contains the whole programme of liberalism: “Die beste Regierungsform ist nicht die worin es am bequemsten ist zu leben, sondern worin dem Bürger sein Recht am meisten gesichert ist.” Reicke, *Lose Blätter*, E. 29.

³ *Works*, vol. v, p. 439. His ethical pathos reveals itself when he writes: “If justice perishes it is of no value any longer that men live on earth.” *Metaphysics of Morals*, 58.

a concept of the State which took account of those irrational factors.

Although Kant's concept of freedom was formal and obscure it was of the highest importance that this problem was broached at all in German political thought. When he regarded freedom primarily as subjection to reason and not as independence of the individuals from the government he reflected the tendency prevailing among the intellectual leaders of the middle class to approach political problems in moral and philosophic terms instead of in terms of political power. This tendency in turn revealed the weakness of the middle classes and their lack of a political consciousness. The important fact remains that Kant was the first thinker in Germany who demanded liberty, equality and security of property as fundamental rights. To blame him because he conceived these rights in a formal sense would mean to demand of him a political philosophy which was not the expression of the prevailing social tendencies. One might just as well blame Augustine for not having been a Protestant or Luther for not having been a Socialist. After a period in which Kant's importance as a political and philosophic thinker has been greatly overrated it has become fashionable to agree with Bertrand Russell who considers him as a "mere misfortune." Whatever his place in the history of philosophy was, his place in the history of German political thought is indisputable. It was in his thought that the German middle class became familiar with the idea of constitutional government and it was not his fault that they were not strong enough to enforce it.

Kant indicated the direction which the political development was to follow in still another respect when he put forward the principle of representation as indispensable to a free state. In order to understand what this meant we must bear in mind that the idea of representation was almost completely unknown in Germany. It was incompatible with the absolutist system. Kant's demand for representation was in fact the demand for the constitutionally limited monarchy in which the rights of

the sovereign are supervised by the elected representatives of the people. The idea of representation is as old as Natural Law itself; it had been used, for instance, to legitimise the Church councils. It had been suppressed later when the theory of the absolute sovereignty of the prince had been acknowledged. It reappeared in the struggle against the absolute princes and was made by Montesquieu a fundamental principle of his theory. Kant adopted this theory because he realised that in Germany the future would not lie with the radical and utopian democratism of Rousseau but with the idea of the representative "Rechtsstaat."

Kant's individualism prevented him from doing justice to such social phenomena as family and nation.¹ His concept of matrimony is shallow and even repulsive.² To discover the people as the rightful source of political activity remained for the thinkers who came after him.

His ideas have never reached the masses, since he was too abstract a thinker. One of his teachings, however, was generally understood. Obedience to the categorical imperative, even if people were not able to grasp its philosophical implications, became the formula for a performance of duty which was carried out as it were for its own sake without personal consideration. The conservative thinkers identified this concept of rigorous performance of duty with absolute devotion to the State, whereas the liberal thinkers emphasised its individualist origin. The German, above all, the Prussian bureaucracy, was trained in this spirit of devotion to which no doubt it owed much of its efficiency.

Kant was a scholar and a middle-class thinker whose thought proceeded from the *Aufklärung* and the Natural Law which had moulded his youth. Under the influence of Rousseau and the impression made on him by the French Revolution, a

¹ Cf. his definition of "Volk": "Unter dem Wort Volk versteht man die im einem Landstrich vereinigte Menge Menschen, in so fern sie ein Ganzes ausmacht." *Works*, vol. i, p. 511.

² Marriage according to him is nothing but "sexual community according to law." *Rechtslehre*, 24, *Works*, vol. v, p. 391.

decisive change took place in him. The problem of freedom in a modern sense was raised, that is the liberation of the middle class from feudalism and absolutism. Kant gave to this problem the formulation which suited best the metaphysical spirit of his fellow countrymen by defining freedom as the governance of the ideal self over the material self. Thus of the two great questions of the political thought of the nineteenth century, the national and social, discussion is opened on the social. Freedom, however, is not yet a political question, but is still essentially an ethical one, that is to say, Kant is not so much concerned with the relation of men to one another as with the relation of man to his better self. Although Kant was no revolutionary, in his autonomy of the individual will he put forward a revolutionary principle which was to take effect when the middle class attained consciousness of their strength and began to transform the ethical problem of autonomy into the political principle of collaboration in the government. It is in this sense that Marx's assertion is true, that Kant's theory is the German theory of the French Revolution.

It has been asserted that Kant's ideal of a state was that of the Prussian state of Frederick the Great.¹ This cannot, however, be maintained since Kant put forward principles such as that of the "Rechtsstaat" which were incompatible with the opinions held by the Prussian king for whom not law but power was the essence of the State. Two further points only need to be mentioned to show the deep difference in the outlook of the two minds. Frederick the Great was convinced that the propelling force in life was self-interest, Kant was the philosopher of altruism. The king regarded war as something not only unavoidable but natural, his greatest subject was the author of the treatise on perpetual peace. Kant thought in terms of Natural Law, the king used its terminology for his political aims.

Kant was, as Ranke styled him, "the mediator between the political thought of the eighteenth century and the cosmopolitan

¹ Cf. Dilthey, *gesammelte Werke*, vol. iii, p. 244.

brand and the humanitarian ideal of the classical era."¹ He was, moreover, the first representative of liberalism in Germany.

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¹ Cf. Kunandra in *Festschrift für Príbram*, p. 123.

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CHAPTER III

FICHTE, THE JACOBIN

AT the outbreak of the French Revolution, Fichte was a young man. He belonged to a generation for which the Seven Years War was merely an historical event, no longer direct experience, and for which the greatness of Frederick the Great was more than overshadowed by the reaction which had ruled in Prussia since 1786. A few years later Joseph the Second, the other great ruler of the Enlightenment, died, and most of the princes, from fear of the Revolution, began to pursue an openly reactionary policy. The people of this generation necessarily realised with particular bitterness the hopeless political conditions of Germany, and were unable to find comfort for the disunity of their country in the political life of the separate small states. They had learned that Germany could produce poets like Klopstock, Goethe, Lessing and Schiller, and thinkers like Kant, who were not merely Prussians, Swabians or Weimar-Saxons but were Germans of European reputation. In the French Revolution they had seen the movement of a whole nation and they had watched with surprise the strength which such a movement could develop.

It might therefore be expected that this generation would raise the problem of German unity, which meant nothing to the former generation. The influence of the Enlightenment, however, was too strong to be shaken off in a few years. For a long time to come the national idea was closely linked with rational and cosmopolitan concepts and patriotism remained identical with faith in the ancient constitution of the Holy Roman Empire.

Fichte, unlike his teacher Kant, was involved from the first in political problems. His earliest writings are political. Politics for him are not a rationally thought-out part of a philosophical system; they are one of the burning questions which life itself

puts to every thinker. If Kant's political ideas were removed from his philosophical system, his work would not lose in greatness and importance, it would perhaps even gain in consistency. In Fichte's doctrine, philosophy and politics are inseparable.

Kant was foremost a thinker, not a man of action, and his political views faithfully mirror the experiences and prejudices of the educated middle class. Fichte also was a philosopher by profession, but he came from the lowest ranks of society, and he was essentially active by nature. "I am not fitted to be a professional scholar, I do not like only to think, I want to act," he wrote to a friend.¹ He owed his education to the beneficence of an aristocratic patron and the whole of his youth was a painful and hard struggle which left indelible traces on his mind. Characteristic of his temperament is the story which his son records in the biography of his father. Fichte was educated in that puritanical, almost gloomy school Schulpforta, which had produced so many men of the first importance. In this school, several boys shared a room, in which an older boy had to supervise the younger ones. These prefects were often fierce tyrants who greatly maltreated their inferiors. One day a teacher surprised the young Fichte, just as he was practising hurling a book against the wall. When he was asked what he was doing, he replied: "I am practising so that, when I am a prefect, I shall be able to box people's ears as well as my prefect now does it to me." These words of the boy express all the defiance of the class to which he belonged and seem particularly characteristic of the philosopher who was to stress the will most of all things. In his early career as a tutor in wealthy families he developed a strong hatred of prerogatives and laid the foundation for his later socialist views.

Fichte was, however, too much under the influence of the Enlightenment to advocate revolutions in practice.² "There

¹ *Letters*, vol. i, p. 62.

² "Violent revolutions," he says, "are always a bold enterprise of mankind; if they succeed the victory gained is worth the sufferings, but if they fail you will push yourself from misery to greater misery." *Works*, vol. vi, p. 5.

is a very sure means of preventing violent revolution" he says, "but there is only one, and that is to instruct the people thoroughly in their rights and duties."¹ In this he was in agreement with all the political thinkers of Enlightenment, who in the age of Rousseau and Pestalozzi thought that proper education was the solution for all problems. Fichte was convinced that it would be sufficient to teach the princes their real duties and to make them realise that absolute power was incompatible with human dignity. In almost naïve optimism he exclaimed: "Be just, you peoples, and your princes will not bear to be unjust alone."² It was, however, on account of his belief in the ideals of the Enlightenment that Fichte criticised the political situation with particular vehemence and bitterness. What made him take up his pen was the feeling, shared by many young men of his generation, that "Things cannot continue as they are now."³ The time of which the basic features were described in the first chapter was characterised by great political unrest. Many people welcomed the French Revolution with the feeling that however bad it might be, at least it would bring a change in the whole political system. The Revolution, which seemed to fulfil the ideas of the Enlightenment, carried these ideas into many circles which had hitherto not been used to question the traditional social order.

Fichte's political development can be clearly divided into four periods if we take his attitude towards the State as the distinguishing factor and if we leave out of account a short preliminary period in which his position was undecided. In the first period, which is chiefly characterised by his pamphlet on the restoration of freedom of thought and by his unfinished writing on the French Revolution, he was an extreme individualist and follower of the doctrine of Natural Law.⁴ This coincided with the period of his life when he had to struggle

¹ *Works*, vol. vi, p. 41.

² *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴ "Die Zurückforderung der Denkfreiheit von den Fürsten Europas" and "Beiträge zur Berichtigung des Urteils des Publikums über die französische Revolution." Cf. also "Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten," 1794.

hardest and to rely completely on his own resources. This period lasted from about 1789 till 1796.

The second period, from about 1796 till 1799, which in the political sphere was characterised chiefly by his treatise on Natural Law, was the most fruitful in the development of his philosophic ideas. He was still under the influence of Natural Law but he began to modify its doctrines. Under the guidance of Kant he attempted to determine the relation of law and ethics, and the State, which in the first period he had entirely neglected, became at least the means of ensuring the rule of law.

In the third period from 1799 till about 1806 he developed the idea of a planned socialistic society in a State which should be a self-contained economic unit. He gave up his liberal point of view and developed the first socialist theory ever put forward in Germany.

In the last period of his life, under the spell of Napoleon, he expounded a national doctrine, which contained almost a glorification of the State, but even in this last period his starting-point remained cosmopolitan and freedom of the individual was still his highest aim.

When Fichte formulated his first political ideas he had not yet formulated his philosophy, yet even these earliest writings are based on his fundamental philosophic beliefs. The point of departure in his metaphysical system is the Ego. The Ego is the creator of the world which is characterised as non-Ego. This is the logical end of a development which had begun with Descartes. The mediaeval world, of which God was the central point, was destroyed; the Ego has become the centre of existence. It is not surprising that Fichte was accused of atheism, and he himself later attempted to justify his philosophy theologically by identifying the Ego with God. Like Kant Fichte is convinced that reality is not something independent of the mind that knows, but whereas Kant retained the distinction between knowing and the unknowable thing in itself, Fichte does not recognise a thing in itself. Man becomes conscious of himself, that is, he exists only by producing the world of objects. There-

fore the non-Ego is a part of the Ego. This system is the system of logical idealism. While the dogmatist feels he is dependent on, even the product of, things, the idealist feels he is their creator. This radical individualism which corresponded to the "Storm and Stress" movement in literature is the philosophic expression of the self-confidence of the leaders of the middle classes.

It is impossible here to go into the details of this philosophic doctrine, which is puzzling and obscure in many ways; what is interesting in our context is its individualistic point of departure. At the same time, we find in it features which are more than individualistic. Fichte's Ego is not the individual Ego of any person, but a super-individual metaphysical construction. No wonder then that Fichte has been interpreted in the most varied ways. Dietzel called him an extreme anti-individualist, Lassalle hailed him as a radical individualist and Hartmann claimed him as a representative of anarchism.¹

What makes Fichte's political ideas so fascinating, but also so difficult to interpret, is that in them old and new ideas are inextricably interwoven. On the one hand he is still dominated by the ideas of Natural Law, and on the other hand we find opinions which go far beyond the field of Natural Law.

Fichte began his career as a writer as an opponent of the Enlightenment, although one of its representatives, Lessing, had influenced him so decisively. His chief motive was a religious one. He was disgusted with the dry and shallow teachings of enlightened theology and went so far as to defend the religious edicts of Wöllner in essays which, however, were never to be published.² He believed that the thinkers of the Enlightenment had closed their eyes to the true religious problems and that Frederick William II had acted on religious conviction.³ His opinion changed very soon when he himself came into conflict

¹ Cf. Glücksohn, *Fichtes Staats- und Wirtschaftslehre*, p. 41.

² See R. Strecker, J. G. Fichte, *Politische Fragmente*, and N. Wallner, *Fichte als politischer Denker*, p. 26 ff.

³ This was his attitude in that period which we have called "preliminary."

with the Prussian censorship authorities, who tried to prevent the publication of his first philosophic work.

The question which has occupied the political thought of all ages and which will doubtless continue to do so, is the question of the legitimization of government. To this question there are, fundamentally, only two answers: one which derives the right of the ruler from God, and the other which ultimately traces the origin of the authority to the people. When belief in the divine source of the authority of the princes began to waver, the teachers of Natural Law found a new source of this right in a rational, abstract contract with the people. Although it was a German, Althusius, who first gave clear expression to the idea of the social contract, yet the idea of the divine source of the rulers' power was still unshaken in Germany. How strong the influence of this idea still was, we have seen in the case of Kant, who held that resistance to the princes was utterly impossible, although he had taken over Rousseau's doctrine of the social contract as the ultimate source of all power.

In this matter Fichte appears in his first period as a decided revolutionary. In this period his thought is entirely directed by an uncompromising enthusiasm for liberty. In an unpublished fragment, we read: "It is assumed here as already proved that the people do not exist for the princes, but the princes for the people, and that the princes have other laws than their caprices."¹ In his pamphlet on the restoration of freedom of thought, published anonymously in 1793, he attacked the princes more violently than had ever been done in Germany. In this passionate piece of writing Fichte contrasted the principle of the civil contract with the assumed right of divine rulership. He announced to the nations the passing of the ages of barbarism, in which the belief prevailed that the princes had a God-given right of property in their subjects. In contrast to this, he voiced the demand for freedom. "Man can neither be inherited, nor sold, nor given away; he cannot be the property of any one, because he is, and must remain, his own property."²

¹ Leon, *Fichte et son temps*, vol. i, p. 163.

² *Works*, vol. vi, p. 11.

He decisively rejected the claim of the princes to be the representatives of God. "No, prince, you are not our God. It is to him that we look for felicity; to you for the protection of our rights. It is not for you to be gracious to us, but to be just."

He found very strong words against the prerogatives of the nobility and it is interesting to note that he based his criticism on the ground that the nobleman had forgotten his social responsibility towards the community. Here we discover the first traces of his later socialist theory. In opposition to those who believed that the atrocities of the French Revolution were the inevitable outcome of the introduction of a free régime, he pointed out that the atrocities resulted from past suppression against which they were the deplorable reaction.¹ Following Rousseau and Spinoza he distinguished between alienable and inalienable rights, and saw the rational criterion for their inalienability in the principle of moral freedom, which is necessary for human dignity. That is to say, those rights the alienation of which would infringe on the principle of moral freedom should be inalienable. Among the inalienable rights he stressed in the first place freedom of thought. Only alienable rights can be made the object of contracts, whereas those rights which man cannot give up without giving up his human dignity cannot even be renounced in the social contract. That was the programme of all those who struggled against the ruling absolutism in the name of the Enlightenment, and it is closely related to the thought of Kant. This early document of the political thought of Fichte reveals already all the essential traits of idealistic philosophy. The starting-point is the ethical concept of liberty and the belief that love of truth is the best foundation of society. Like Kant, Fichte stressed the autonomy of man as the most important ethical principle.

Although the pamphlet was not a directly revolutionary appeal, it could have become the manifesto of a revolution, had Germany been ripe for revolution. It is, however, very significant that Fichte, while attacking violently the excesses

¹ *Works*, vol. vi, p. 64.

of absolutism, did not question the monarchical institution as such. This was partly due to the fact that a radical onslaught on the principle of monarchy would not have passed a censor in Germany, but it also shows that even such a radical representative of middle-class thought as Fichte took monarchy for granted. Yet we hear in this writing an entirely new tone. Compare the vigorous cascades of this outburst against absolutism, which characteristically of Fichte is composed in the form of an address, with the ponderous and measured periods of Kant, and it will be seen that Fichte was a true politician, with a passion for politics. It also clearly reflects the political excitement which the Revolution had caused. And yet, as the publisher complained, it hardly became known at all.

In this first period Fichte's hatred of absolutism is almost unbounded and we feel that there must be psychological reasons for such excessive criticism.¹ There are, in fact, such reasons. The two political treatises of this period were published in Danzig and probably written there. In Danzig Fichte had ample opportunity to study the encroachments of Prussian absolutism on personal liberty. Ever since Frederick the Great had occupied the port of Danzig in 1772 the town had suffered heavily from the arbitrariness of Prussian officials. There was therefore much unrest and political excitement amongst the citizens till the town was finally annexed by Prussia in 1793, and it was in this atmosphere of political insecurity that Fichte conceived or even composed his appeals against absolutism.²

In the second period of his political thought, characterised by his work on Natural Law, Fichte appears as the last great representative of the school of Natural Law, although systems of Natural Law have been developed by innumerable thinkers after him. Since the theory of Natural Law had been developed in order to give expression to the opposition of the individual against the State, the individual was the point of departure for

¹ Fichte himself described these early writings in 1799 as "the indiscretions of a young man."

² Cf. Erben, *Fichte Studien*, p. 288 ff.

all the exponents of Natural Law from Althusius to Kant, and the State was merely a means for the attainment of ends which the solitary individual could not hope to achieve.¹ It was not the aim of these thinkers to explain existing conditions, but to legitimise certain political demands, above all, certain minimum rights. Natural Law, therefore, had always a radical character.² The social contract, especially, served not so much to explain the theoretical nature of the State as to defend the autonomy of the individual in practice. At the same time this idea was used, at least by some thinkers, to justify the rights of the people against the princes. "The fundamental conception is that of the dignity of the common element of human Reason," Troeltsch writes, "as it appears in every individual; and this conception, in turn, goes back to that of a 'common law,' pervading all nature and the whole universe, and proceeding from a divine principle of reason, which expresses itself increasingly in the successive stages of created beings. The true nature of man is assumed to be the divine reason operating in him with its sovereignty over the senses and affections"³ This religious basis of Natural Law, as Troeltsch points out, prevented it from really having revolutionary results. The old idea of the "universitas" had been upheld, and was merely, so to speak, propped up by rationalism. Reason or nature had taken the place of God, the theocratic idea had been displaced by that of the social contract, but the concept of the State was still the concept of a universal order. It can clearly be seen that the concept of a national state was incompatible with the concept of Natural Law. This is the reason why the concept of the modern national state could only emerge after the ideas of Natural Law had lost their strength.

Another point is of first importance if we want to understand the development of political thought in this period. Natural Law insisted on the ethical character of law. To the adherent of

¹ Cf. Dilthey, *gesammelte Schriften*, vol. ii, p. 176.

² Gierke, *Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*, vol. iv, p. 277.

³ Troeltsch in Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society*, translated by Barker, p. 205.

Natural Law, law was part of ethics. We have seen that, although Kant attempted clearly to separate ethics and law, he nevertheless upheld the dependence of law on ethics. This idea was accepted by Kant's disciples, who continued to think in terms of Natural Law, as may be seen from the example of Hufeland. The latter published in 1790 a handbook on Natural Law, in which he made use of Kant's principles. He distinguished between duties and rights, but makes both dependent on the Moral Law (*Sittengesetz*). Duties determine those actions which moral law requires, whereas rights determine those actions which it merely permits. "Everyone has a right to want anything which is in accordance with the dignity of human nature, the personality of man."¹ Law is thus nothing but a function of ethics. Similar ideas are found in other contemporary writers on Natural Law, such as Erhard Schmidt, Schmalz and Nettelbladt.

Fichte turns against this attitude in his treatise on Natural Law, though he had still upheld it in his book on the Revolution. He demands that the philosophy of law should become an independent science which would not have to receive its sanctions from ethics. Moreover, he relates law to the State and declares that law cannot be conceived outside the State. Thus he clears the way for an historical and national examination of legal questions. If law is no longer a part of universal ethics valid for all men, but is an independent social problem, it can and must be studied as such. This means at the same time the end of the theory of Natural Law.

For Fichte, as for Kant, the starting-point of political thought is the concept of freedom. "My system," he wrote, "from beginning to end is merely an analysis of the concept of freedom."² For him, too, freedom consists in the autonomy of the individual. "If man allows laws to be made for him by the will of others, he thereby makes himself into a beast, that is, he injures his inborn human dignity."³ Fichte starts from the

¹ Hufeland, *Lehrsatze des Naturrechts*, p. 58.

² Letters, vol. ii, p. 20.

³ Works, vol. vi, pp. 81, 82.

assumption that nature intended man for freedom. A man is free, in this philosophical sense, if he is completely at one with himself, that is, if he has overcome all external influences and his individual ego is in accord with reason, as expressed by the pure ego. "Believe in your freedom, and you are free—create, shape and form the things of the outside world according to your ideas and aims, then you are their master and they must serve you, your destiny is to be master and theirs is to serve." We see here the idealistic character of his doctrine; things are entirely dependent on the Ego, which not only knows but acts, and, in its pure form, is identical with reason. For Fichte, civilisation is merely the means of attaining to the pure Ego, or to freedom. "Civilisation means using all our powers for the purpose of complete freedom, complete independence of everything which is not ourselves, our pure Ego."¹ He is convinced that it is possible to detect in history a progress of mankind towards this complete freedom, that is, to an unrestricted rule of reason. Man is free when he is subject only to this reason, and to the moral law which it sets up. Fichte gives a still more subjective form to the categorical imperative than Kant does. "Act in such a way that you could think of the maxims of your will as an eternal law for yourself." Political freedom consists in not being subject to any laws other than those to which one has consented. So far, Fichte follows the traditional systems of Natural Law. But, in his Natural Law, Fichte gives a foundation to law which treats it as a social problem subject to its own rules. Here, too, his point of departure is his concept of the Ego. This Ego of Fichte's is not a metaphysical abstraction to which attributes and faculties can be referred, but an entity consisting only in the working of these attributes and faculties. That is, man does not have an Ego as something distinct from himself, but he is an Ego only in so far as he thinks of himself as, so to speak sets himself up to be, an active and thinking being. But when the individual becomes conscious of himself as such, that is, as an active

¹ *Works*, vol. vi, p. 87.

and thinking being, then he necessarily thinks of himself together with other individuals. "Man becomes man only among other human beings; if there are to be human beings at all, there must be a number of them."¹ As early as in his writing on the Revolution, Fichte clearly recognised the nature of society and pointed out there were two concepts of society. According to one of them society is conceived as a physical co-existence of human beings, while the other is the concept put forward by the teachers of Natural Law according to which men live in society, not merely in physical contiguity but under a contract. Fichte dismissed the first concept and recognised that life in society was determined by the idea of a social contract by which human society is distinguished from a herd. "Man is destined to live in society, he must live in society, he is no complete human being and contradicts his nature if he lives in isolation."²

Fichte recognised that if law is only conceived as part of ethics, as that which is merely permitted by ethics, the result must be a negative concept of law, that is to say, a concept according to which law is that system of regulations which is *not* the ethical one. In his outline of Natural Law Fichte based his distinction between law and ethics on the assertion that the Ego had a sensual side as the real Ego, and an ideal one as the absolute Ego. Law now deals with the relation of free beings to each other in so far as they are real Egos and has to take into account only the sensual and selfish Ego, while ethics address the absolute Ego. It can easily be seen that this is fundamentally the same distinction which Kant drew between the *noumenon* and the *phenomenon*. With Fichte also the point of departure is individualistic, since the only function of law is to determine the boundaries of the sphere of activity of the individual. "The finite reasonable being cannot assume other finite reasonable beings outside himself without assuming that he stands with them in a particular relation, which is called the legal relation (*Rechtsverhältnis*)."³ But here law is recognised as an exclusively

¹ Works, vol. iii, p. 36.

² Ibid., vol. vi, p. 306.

social relation. Freedom in this social sense is only possible if each individual acknowledges that he is subject to limitations which are necessary for the maintenance of the freedom of the other individuals. The idea of the freedom of the individual presupposes the idea of a community of all individuals. The individual cannot even conceive of his own freedom without thinking as well of the freedom of all the others.

Constraint and law become complements and the essence of law consists in its combination with constraint. Constraint is only applied if one individual does not recognise the right of another. By so doing he places himself outside the sphere of law and the wronged individual has the right to constrain the evil-doer to act according to law. Constraint, however, must only be applied in the form of law, that is to say, it must be predetermined, for otherwise there would be danger of its application being arbitrary. The effect of the constraining law ought to be that from any violation of the right of another person the same or a corresponding violation of his own right followed for the person who has committed the violation. The ideal situation would be that this consequence would take place with mechanical necessity. Since such mechanical necessity cannot be achieved, the execution of the constraining law, in order to avoid arbitrariness, must be placed in the hands of an impartial authority which would safeguard the liberty of the individual. This impartial authority is the State.

The State is, in the eyes of Fichte in his early periods, nothing but an institution composed of individuals, the sole aim of which is the maintenance and protection of the rights of the individuals. It is the interest in his security which has driven man into the State.¹ The State is not an end in itself nor an ideal as such. The one thing which can certainly be said of it is that it must not hamper the ends which the moral law prescribes to the individual. With this concept Fichte is in accordance with the doctrine of Natural Law. According to this doctrine the State is, as Hufeland defined it, "the only

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 273.

satisfactory expedient for averting the evils of society and maintaining its advantages." In Fichte's system also, at least in the first two periods of his thought, the State has no essential significance as such, but is only a transitional and auxiliary phenomenon. "The life in the State cannot be counted among the necessary aims of man; but it is only an expedient applied under certain circumstances for the foundation of a perfect society. The State as all human institutions aims at its own destruction: it is the aim of every government to make government superfluous."¹ In this a chiliastic feature reveals itself, an almost religious belief in reason which we are not surprised to find in a child of the Enlightenment. Fichte goes so far as to conceive of the State simply as a sum of individuals: "The State in itself is nothing but an abstract notion, only the citizens as such are real persons."² Its only purpose is to guarantee what Fichte called the original rights (*Urrechte*). These original rights are the right of self-determination, the right of property and the right of self-preservation. Every individual has these rights in his capacity as a being endowed with reason. The foundation of the State is the Social Contract which must be concluded unanimously and from which each individual has the right to depart at any time. Fichte divides the Social Contract into three parts: the property contract, the protection contract and the unification contract. The latter is the social contract proper by which the individuals become members of a whole, while the two others are only auxiliary contracts.³

The task of the State is to find a political will which is of necessity the common will. Fichte objects to the separation of powers since such a separation would contradict his demand for a common will. The executive (if one can speak of such a thing when no separation is admitted) is the natural and only

¹ *Works*, vol. vi, p. 306. This idea that the State, as it were, cancels itself has been adopted by Marxians. ² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 371.

³ "It is that (contract) by which all converge into one thing; and are no longer united in an abstract sense into a 'compositum' but virtually into a *totum*." *Works*, vol. iii, p. 203. This is an unmistakable acknowledgment of the organic principle, though it is only used as a metaphor.

interpreter of the common will in its pronouncements on the relation of the individuals. Fichte, however, is aware that the authority which actually executes Government must be subjected to a certain control lest it should degenerate into despotism. He demands, therefore, that the Government should utter no expression of its will which is not compatible with the law. Thus he seems to raise the demand for a state subject to the rule of law. To this end he introduces the *ephors* whose task is to supervise and if necessary to impeach the executive. He leaves open the question before whom the *ephors* shall impeach the executive and in fact the whole procedure is left very vague. The idea of the *ephors* shows clearly Fichte the liberal. Although he had given up the inexorable hostility towards the State which is characteristic of his first period, he is still filled with a deep distrust of the power of the Government, in which he rightly sees the chief expression of the State. With the concept of the *ephors* he introduces into the mechanism of the State a control of public activities which can be compared with the control exercised by the law courts over private activities. Thus he initiates a movement which left its mark on all future constitutional struggles. Again and again the liberals of the nineteenth century tried to introduce such barriers and controls in order to check the activities of the Government. The *ephors* are not supposed to have any direct power in their hands as this would simply make them a department of the Government, they must only have the possibility to declare illegal certain measures of the executive power. Fichte, however, cannot help realising that the *ephors* are of little use if they ally themselves with the executive, for instance if they are bribed by the latter. He comforts himself with the unconvincing artifice that a people in which the *ephors* are a failure does not deserve a Constitution at all.¹ Hegel therefore rightly called the conception of the ephorate a wholly empty idea.

In order to prevent the executive from becoming despotic it must above all be prevented from getting a power at its

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 182.

disposal which would be capable of resisting successfully the united power of the community.¹ If, however, all precautionary measures should fail, Fichte accords to the people the right of active resistance which Kant had denied it. It can easily be seen that these ideas are not very lucid and logical and do not testify to a deep insight into political reality. They are entirely dictated by Fichte's hatred of absolutism and it appears as if Fichte is primarily concerned with weakening the power of the State, which had in his time so often been employed to the detriment of the people.² And yet Fichte's concept of the State contains already an element which was to explode the rigid individualistic character of his doctrine. Fichte ascribes to the State the positive task of ensuring liberty. Liberty now for Fichte is more than a negative principle, it is identical with civilisation, which is the dominance of moral freedom in society.³ From this idea to the glorification of the State as the embodiment of civilisation there is only one step. This was rightly recognised by the lawyer Schmalz when in criticising Fichte he protested against the overestimation of the State and he proclaimed security of individual rights as the exclusive aim of society.⁴

At first sight, it might seem strange that this thinker, who stood for the most extreme individualism, may also be regarded as the representative of a sociological concept of law. In reality, however, this excessive individualism, as we shall see, actually leads to socialism. In order to free the individual from all the chains with which theocracy and feudalism had bound him, it was necessary to make him the absolute centre of society. Fichte does this with iron logic, particularly in his first period. He considers the individual will so much the source of all law that it cannot be bound even by the social contract. The will of the individual is the only legitimate lawgiver.⁵ Therefore the indivi-

¹ The idea that the power of the sovereign must be stronger than that of a single or several individuals but weaker than that of the multitude, was put forward by Aristotle. *Politics*, iii, 1286 b. 35.

² "The State must, above all, remain in its boundaries." *Works*, vol. vi, p. 68.

³ "Civilisation means exercising all forces for the sake of complete freedom." ⁴ Schmalz, *Rechtsphilosophie*, p. 202.

⁵ *Works*, vol. vi, p. 80.

dual can enter the State when he likes and abandon it at any time.¹ The social contract is binding only so long as the individual considers himself bound by it. Thus Fichte goes even further than Rousseau who held that the social contract could be annulled only by the sovereign himself.² Therefore Fichte does not doubt the legality of the French Revolution. We see that it is not altogether unjustifiable to find traces of anarchical ideas in Fichte's thought, for anarchism consists in denying that the individual can be bound in any way.

Fichte even goes so far as to require that all voting shall be unanimous, and advises the minority to abandon the State if it does not want to conform with the decision of the majority.³ It was by this one-sided individualism alone that in his opinion freedom could be saved. It must not be forgotten that when Fichte published his book on the French Revolution in 1793, and particularly when he published his treatise on Natural Law, the enthusiasm for the Revolution had already cooled down and very distinguished opponents of the French ideas, such as Burke, Rehberg and Gentz, had appeared on the scene. We saw that these men were essentially conservative and wished to uphold the old régime, though certainly with some necessary reforms. Guglia even asserts that after 1793 the only remaining supporters of the Revolution were politically quite inexperienced people and fanatics.⁴ That this is at least exaggerated is proved by the example of Fichte. Fichte was neither inexperienced nor a fanatic, he was a man of a revolutionary temperament, though he did not want revolution in practice. For him freedom was more than a negative protection of rights against the princes, the right of freedom itself was based on philosophy. The Revolution, for him, was not an object of aesthetic admiration, but an eminently practical political question. It seems as though social problems had greater importance for him, the son of a poor weaver, than for that group of intellectuals who were

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, pp. 201, 369; vol. vi, p. 115.

² *Contrat Social*, book iii, ch. 18.

³ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 198.

⁴ *Fr. Gentz*, p. 102.

more superficially affected by the Revolution. Fichte, therefore, kept faith with the problems of the Revolution and it was as a protest against reactionaries like Rehberg that he developed his radical Jacobinism.

Fichte was by no means of the opinion, which we have already come across, that the lower classes were immature and unfit to take an active part in political life. Even as early as in his writing on the Revolution he derived from the principle of reason the equality of all citizens, and demanded equal access to all official positions. Raising an outspokenly liberal demand he pleaded for the abolition of the aristocracy, as the most prominent example of an inequality incompatible with moral law. That claim was made by other thinkers too. But Fichte went further; he raised the socialistic demand that every member of the community must be placed in a position to live fittingly: "that every one should be able to live by his activity, for to be able to live is the inalienable right of all men."¹ For this purpose he claimed that every citizen should have the right to work. Fichte went so far as to state that the social contract does not exist for any man who is unable to live fittingly. To fight against unemployment is, in his opinion, to fight for human dignity. On the other hand, he considered that whoever does not work has not the right to a share in the national income. For instance, the aristocrat, who has lived on the work of his serfs, is to be maintained by the community only until he has learned a profession by which he can maintain himself. "No man on earth has the right to leave his powers unused and to live on those of others."² Thus he formulated the protest of the middle class against the feudal order of society.

In this demand Fichte was far in advance of his time, even though we find similar ideas in Schlözer. This is the voice not merely of the middle class, but already that of the fourth estate, whose struggle for the change in social relationships was to leave its mark on all later revolutions. Essentially, Fichte was occupied with the peasant question, the solution of which was

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 212.

² *Ibid.*, vol. vi, p. 189.

one of the most fundamental economic problems of the time. His socialism was a peasant socialism. He believed that the most effective way of opposing the monopoly of prices, which was upheld by the big landowners, was to demand a re-partition of the land. He was convinced that the small farmer on his own land could do more valuable work for the common good than the serf. Therefore he was in complete sympathy with those measures of the French Revolution by which the privileges of the landowning aristocracy had been abolished. It is true that this attitude was influenced by experiences he had as a child, and later as a tutor in aristocratic families. But these ideas are, of course, more than psychological reactions to personal experiences. We have seen that they were in the air. The economic conditions of the time were in the throes of a process of fundamental change, and the complete liberation of the peasants was one of its results.

Fichte's doctrine of property deserves a special treatment.¹ For Rousseau and Kant, property as a legal institution was based entirely on the social contract, though according to these thinkers, provisional possession could already be found in the state of nature. With them property is constituted by taking possession and confirmed by the provisions of the social contract. The extent and content of property is in accordance with Roman Law the absolute domination exerted by an individual over an object.

In his writing on the Revolution Fichte, in dogmatic exaggeration of some principles of Natural Law, had called not the State but the reasonable nature of man the sole source of property. Later, however, he admitted that property was a product of the social contract, though he continued to trace its derivation to an original right of the individual based on nature.² Fichte spiritualised and idealised the concept of property. For him property was not the domination of an individual over

¹ Cf. *Works*, vol. vi, p. 118 ff.

² This change is shown in the fact that the social contract contains an auxiliary property contract.

an object but "the right to exclude any other person from the use of an object which we have created through our labour and to which we have given form." Not the material as such is the object of property but the formed and manufactured material. Property is the product of labour. This theory was particularly fitting in a time when labour in the form of personal initiative was to become the propelling force of society. In the feudal society the title on which property was based was solely the greater power of the lord who was in possession of the land; in the bourgeois society whose nascence we witness, the title was to be not mere force but personal qualities such as thriftiness, initiative and industry.¹

In 1800 Fichte published *The Closed Commercial State*, which represents a landmark in his development. It must at once be pointed out, however, that the immediate influence of this remarkable treatise was very small. The public did not take it seriously and looked on it merely as a utopian speculation, although the political ideas which are expressed in it have continued to play an important part in Germany until to-day.²

This treatise contains Fichte's economic ideas and what has been called his socialism. Whereas Fichte had in his first two periods developed chiefly liberal views, that is to say, had in the first place been concerned with defining the sphere of liberty of the individual in the State, he reaches in this treatise genuinely socialistic conclusions. In his liberal period he raised demands such as the right to work only because the existence of the individual was the indispensable presupposition for the performance of his tasks as a human being. But in this period he ascribed the task of maintaining the individual not to the State but to society.³ In the treatise on the self-contained com-

¹ It is true that the original title of feudal property was derived from the war services which the lord had rendered to the prince of whom he held his property. But these services were forgotten after some generations, as in the capitalistic society the heir may forget that the money was acquired by his predecessor in exerting the bourgeois qualities and in rendering service to the progress of capitalistic society.

² Adam Müller called it "Eines der mutwilligsten Spiele, das das Jahrhundert der Schwärmerie gesehen hat." *Schriften*, 1812, vol. i, p. 327 ff.

³ Compare Wallner, loc. cit., p. 73 ff.

mercial state we encounter a fundamental change in his views. The interest in economic problems had in the last decades of the eighteenth century, especially after the publication of A. Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, increased enormously. The middle classes everywhere began to realise that economics was to be their proper domain and that political and economic power were closely connected. Thus in the economic sphere the same development took place which was one of the features of the development of modern Western civilisation in general. As the intellectual fetters of the Middle Ages had been destroyed and the individual since the Renaissance had become the centre of the intellectual world, the economic mediaeval fetters also began to disappear. With the destruction of the guilds and the liberation and enlargement of trade and traffic the individual as such had become the centre of economic life. The regulated economic organisations had been replaced by the initiative of entrepreneurs. At first the individual had merely been the object of the economic efforts of absolutism. Under the influence of mercantilist theories and in their quest for new sources of income enlightened rulers such as Frederick the Great had endeavoured to patronise trade and commerce and had developed an energetic activity in the economic sphere. In Prussia, however, this development could not take its full effect since in the sphere of agriculture the mediaeval fetters were to be upheld for a long time to come.

The individual who in the Middle Ages had participated in economic life only through the corporation found himself now "isolated in the midst of a society which opened the way to wealth to those who were economically strong, and without rights against the power of the absolute mercantile state which had concluded an alliance of world-wide importance with the great financial powers."¹ Mercantilism was one of the necessary transitional stages towards modern national economics. "Its essence," as Schmoller writes, "lies not in some doctrine of money or of the balance of trade; not in tariff barriers, protec-

¹ M. Weber, *Fichtes Socialismus und der Marxismus*, p. 3.

tive duties, or navigation laws, but in something far greater: namely in the total transformation of society and its organisation, as well as of the State and of its institutions, in the replacing of a local and territorial economic policy by that of the nation and State."¹ It is hardly an exaggeration to say that without the economic laws of Colbert about 1670 the French Revolution would have been impossible.

A reaction very soon set in against mercantilism. The physiocrats saw in the soil the chief source of wealth and believed that general free trade would best favour the wealth of the nations, especially as they believed in a natural order of life. Behind this belief there lay the belief of the age in a universal reason, and the principles of the physiocrats were only the economic form of the prevailing rationalism and cosmopolitanism. Their belief in the pre-eminent importance of agriculture, for instance, corresponded to Rousseau's belief in nature.

The whole of the economic history of this period is characterised by the struggle of the physiocrats against the representatives of the old mercantilist ideas. Only a few examples which illustrate the divergent economic tendencies need be quoted. Up to the death of Frederick the Great, Prussia had maintained a strong protectionist economic policy, chiefly dictated by military reasons. On October 31, 1786, a few weeks after the death of Frederick the Great, the Prussian Minister of Finance proposed to the king the abolition of all duties on corn. This measure was partly carried out, but as early as 1787 the import of corn into Silesia was prohibited again, and in 1789 the export of corn was forbidden to the whole kingdom. In the years 1797-1806 the details of the corn policy in Prussia were altered almost every year. The same had been the case in France. The economic development, above all the development of finance, became more and more difficult. The price of corn was determined by speculators who had the capital to store great quantities of cereals and kept them back for times of dearth. Famine and scarcity were the consequences. Riots occurred repeatedly,

¹ *The Mercantile System and its Historical Significance*, p. 51.

and the people in some places forced the merchants to sell the corn cheaply in the markets. Very soon socialist tendencies made themselves felt, and the demand was raised that the State should interfere in economic life to put an end to the economic anarchy. These tendencies naturally increased during the actual course of the Revolution. Target proposed to the Comité de Constitution a declaration of the rights of man, the sixth article of which was to run: "Le corps politique doit à chaque homme des moyens de subsistance, soit par la propriété, soit par le travail, soit par le secours de ses semblables." Target's proposed provision was not included in the actual Declaration of the Rights of Man, but it is noteworthy that here the demand was raised to ascribe to the State a positive economic task and a responsibility for the individual. On June 26, 1793, the National Assembly issued a law in which the forestalling of corn was declared a crime against the State and was made punishable. At the same time the police was commissioned to set up fixed prices and to supervise the sale of corn which was made obligatory. The socialist tendencies came to a head in the unsuccessful conspiracy of Babeuf, who aimed at setting up an overtly communistic society. He demanded absolute equality of property and declared as theft all property which exceeded that which is necessary for the satisfaction of immediate wants. He demanded further that the State should control all economic activities and that private commerce with foreign states should be forbidden. According to him the individual had not only a right but also a duty to work in the interests of the community.

When Fichte wrote *The Closed Commercial State*, he had before his mind the economic development of Prussia and France. He had noticed how especially the corn policy of France had swung from one extreme to the other without finding a way out of the difficulties which led finally to the Revolution. This naturally filled him with a deep distrust of the whole prevailing economic system, though at the same time it stirred up in him a great interest in economic problems.

Fichte shared his discontent with the economic situation with many of his contemporaries. The mercantile efforts of the absolute princes, though they had patronised trade and industry, had led to a host of wars with economic aims and had not improved the situation of the masses, but had only raised in them an increased desire for worldly goods.

Agriculture was still, especially in Germany, the backbone of the economic system. It is therefore not surprising to find that Fichte followed the physiocrats in demanding particular care for the interests of the peasants. Apart from that, he had no sympathy with their ideas. Though he also believed in their natural order he became convinced that this order could not be realised by way of economic freedom, but only through a rigid State socialism. He denounced their optimism, which made them believe that everything would turn out well in the end if the Government refrained from interfering. Fichte thus opposed Adam Smith and the liberal optimists of his school. Smith's liberalism could thrive only on the soil of England, whose geographical and social position had made her ripe for the Industrial Revolution. Fichte saw only dangers for Germany in free trade because he realised that Germany so far had neither an enterprising middle class nor political unity. He was afraid that general free trade would ruin the backward agriculture of Germany. The history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries teaches that liberal ideas only thrive in times of prosperity, while in times of trouble and insecurity the people cry for the powerful State.

These are the reasons why Fichte demanded the "closed commercial State," in contrast to his earlier periods in which he had been convinced that the social question would solve itself if economic freedom was established.¹ As in Plato's State, another answer to a time of trouble, so in Fichte's ideal State the classes are rigidly separated from each other and contribute each in its way to the commonwealth. In this State all are servants of the whole and receive in return for their services their just

¹ *Works*, vol. vi, p. 182.

share in the goods of the community. Here we discover already the organic and corporative theory of the State.

Fichte distrusted international economy long before it had assumed its present form, and like the National Socialists of to-day he demanded exclusion from it. That he considered his plan not as a Utopia but as a practicable proposal is proved by the fact that he dedicated the book to the Prussian minister Struensee who, however, dismissed it as a product of imagination in his letter of thanks. In fact, Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* was a Utopia, since it presupposed economic measures which could never be put into practice. Utopian systems tend to appear in times of economic transition, and just as More's ideal commonwealth reflected the transition from the feudal system towards absolutism, so Fichte's Utopia reflected the transformation of mercantilist into capitalist society.

Fichte's ideas have been equally claimed by nationalists and socialists. Treitschke and Lassalle have lauded him with equal warmth, and this is easily understandable since his doctrine contained nationalist as well as socialist elements. A "self-contained" State must be national in some sense. Every political doctrine which makes the will the centre of the political life leads to the omnipotence of the State, be it in the absolutism of a leader or the absolutism of the people or rather a group which claims to be the people.

In contrast to his first writings Fichte ascribed to the State in his *Closed Commercial State* a positive function and even uttered a warning against minimising the importance of the State. He had become convinced that it was the task of the State to give to everybody what is his due, to install him first in his property and then to protect it.¹ "The duty of the State does not only consist in protecting the mass of goods accumulated by somebody and in preventing another who has nothing from getting something, but its true aim is to procure for its subjects that which is their due as members of mankind and to maintain them in their possession."² Thus Fichte advocated

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 403.

² *Ibid.*, p. 399.

a system of planned economics and turned against those thinkers who, like, for instance, Schmalz, regarded the landed proprietors as the only true citizens.

The teachers of Natural Law had seen in the State nothing else but society in so far as it protected property, especially landed property, against all possible attacks. It was one of the chief tasks of the German idealists to oppose to this materialistic concept of the State an ideal one. Already in Kant's doctrine hints can be discerned that he felt the need to gain a loftier conception of the aims of the State than that which turned it into an institution for the protection of the existing order of property. His ideal of a perpetual peace, for instance, can only be understood if we presuppose that he considered the State at least as a partial realisation of an ethical community. Fichte proceeded along these lines. He recognised that the State must realise justice and that this is only possible if it is a community which enables the individual to live according to the moral law. That is why Fichte maintained in his system of ethics that it is a duty of conscience for the individual to unite himself with others in a State and not merely a matter of expediency.

This turning of the tide towards a positive attitude to the State cannot be surprising if we bear in mind that Fichte always had ascribed to society the task to lead the individuals through freedom to civilisation, and that in his second period he had substituted the State for society.¹ The individual is still the point of departure and the social contract the basis, but the State is recognised as a positive means to guarantee the intellectual and physical life of the individual. Thus Fichte demands in the interests of the individual several incisive encroachments on the liberty of the individual. As far as the details of his economic programme are concerned, he develops ideas which are astonishingly similar to those of Babeuf, so that it seems as though he had been influenced by him directly. He also raises the demand for work as a right of the individual. This demand

¹ Cf. Wallner, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

is not only an economic but also an ethical one. As in his *Wissenschaftslehre* the Ego leads an ethical existence only when and so far as it acts, so the social Ego can only develop itself when and so far as it works.

In his *Closed Commercial State* economics are entirely controlled by the State. The State, above all, controls the production and fixes the prices and margins of profit. It prevents buying up of corn and keeps stores of its own for times of dearth. This system gives no scope to free private initiative and has been rightly described as State socialism. As the control which Fichte demands can only be carried out if the State is excluded from trade with other States, the idea of autarchy was only a logical consequence. Only in a self-contained State can prices and production be regulated and an equilibrium be maintained as the outcome of a careful division of labour.

Fichte's development from individualism to socialism shows that radical individualism necessarily leads eventually to socialism or, as seen from another angle, that socialism is ultimately based on individualism. In order to secure the rights of the individual or of a group of individuals the sphere of liberty of each single individual must be limited in proportion as the social life becomes more complicated. The limitation to which the individual is subject in the age of democracy is often far greater than that to which he had to submit under the system of absolutism. Fichte's conversion to socialism, not in its modern form but as a system of rigid control, is typical of the development which the middle classes in Germany were to undergo and anticipates it. The middle classes will give up their original individualism as soon as they despair of the possibility of "getting on" in the economic sphere.

Fichte has been reproached for the materialistic character of his doctrine. His State has been called an obligatory insurance company for the purpose of securing the material needs of life. This hardly does justice to Fichte's ideas. The backbone of his State socialism is the development of the individual towards intellectual and ethical fulfilment. If Fichte demands an agree-

able existence for every member of the State he does so because he realises that this is the necessary presupposition for the performance of ethical duties.¹ Only a man who has been treated justly can be expected to lead a life of justice. Nobody has better formulated the principle of the equality of opportunity than Fichte when he writes: "It must be owing to one's own decision if one lives more uncomfortably than another, never owing to the decision of other people."²

Fichte's distrust of trade and industry shows that he foresaw the development which the capitalist system was to take in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and he only anticipates ideas which under different economic conditions were to gain ground. In 1800, it is true, these ideas remained almost unnoticed. The rising middle classes saw only the advantages and not yet the disadvantages of the Industrial Revolution. They demanded in the first place economic liberty, which seemed more important even than political liberty. The idea of autarchy and of the control by the State was to be resumed in Germany when international economic relations had got into the greatest disorder and after the middle classes had been deprived of their economic preponderance and lost all hope in the possibilities of capitalist economics.

Fichte's closed commercial State was not a national State in the modern sense. Fichte was still far from pronouncing the dogma of modern nationalism. In his opinion the fatherland was identical with the land in which intellectual freedom prevailed and he used scathing words against the narrow-mindedness of nationalism.³ He even thought at one time of becoming a French citizen himself. His belief in universal reason was unshaken, and he still was under the influence of the cosmopolitan ideas of the French Revolution. He was convinced that his brand of socialism was only a logical develop-

¹ Fichte expresses this idea in his obscure style in the following way: "Die Menschheit sondert sich ab vom Bürgertume, um mit absoluter Freiheit sich zur Moralität zu erheben; dies aber nur, inwiefern der Mensch durch den Staat hindurchgeht, *Works*, vol. iii, p. 206.

² *Works*, vol. i, p. 402.

³ *Correspondence*, i, p. 449.

ment of the ideas which were expressed in the Revolution. His closed commercial State also is a product of the era of Enlightenment. In Fichte's opinion the task of politics was to take care that the actual State approximated as nearly as possible to the State of reason. In the treatise on *The Closed Commercial State*, fundamentally the same optimism reveals itself which had made Fichte believe in his first period that the reign of reason would establish itself if the individual were left entirely to himself. Nevertheless, it was in this essay that he for the first time used such terms as "national character" and "national honour."

Fichte was the first thinker in Germany who developed a consistent system of liberalism. In that he is like W. v. Humboldt, a typical representative of claims which were raised by the educated class of his time. The State had been discredited by the absolute system, and the interests of all politically-minded persons had become concentrated on the problems of society, which was conceived as a wider and more important organisation than the State. Fichte distinguished himself from Kant in that his political thinking combined liberal and socialist ideas and from Humboldt in that he professed himself a supporter of democracy and ascribed to the State even in his first period a more important part than Humboldt was ever willing to do. Fichte, for instance, has clearly developed the principle of the sovereignty of the people, which meant nothing to Humboldt.

Fichte was also the first German thinker who, after he had given up his liberal views, developed a consistent system of socialism, although he kept to the end some of his liberal principles. Modern socialists refuse to acknowledge him as a socialist and are only ready to admit that he maintained a sort of State capitalism. We need not concern ourselves with this controversy.¹ The important fact is that Fichte, as soon as he lost his belief in the pre-established harmony of the economic order, demanded a rigid regulation of the economic

¹ Fichte's system is not a socialist one in the modern sense of the term, since he defended private property and private production.

life by the State in the interests of the community. In this he was far ahead of his class and anticipated the development of political thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is certainly no accident that the only German political thinker who was of proletarian origin was the first to expound socialist ideas.

In this first part we had only to deal with Fichte the Jacobin, the fighter against absolutism. Fichte the nationalist must be treated in the third part, when we shall discuss the development of the national ideal in Germany.

For Bibliography, see CHAPTER XII

CHAPTER IV

WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT

IT is an often noticed phenomenon that in times of revolutionary transformation some members of the ruling class assume leadership in the struggle against the old order of society or at least prepare the struggle theoretically. Catiline, Condorcet and Mirabeau were members of the ruling class; and the leaders and theorists of modern socialism have often been the sons of industrialists or noblemen as the examples of Engels and Lenin show. Every class produces men who clearly recognise the weak points in the old order and who, disgusted with the indifference of their equals to the social issues, turn their back on their class and its ideas. Humboldt, it is true, was far from being a revolutionary, and he never took the final step of complete separation from his class, but in his intellectual outlook he had entirely emancipated himself from it. He has much in common with Mirabeau, by whom he was deeply influenced, and had there been a revolution in Germany in his time, he might have laid claim to the noble title of a German Mirabeau.

No one among the members of his class recognised more clearly than he that the time of benevolent despotism, with which the nobility had completely identified itself in Germany, had gone for ever. It is noteworthy that Humboldt, the son of a noble Prussian officer, had the closest connection of all the political thinkers of the period with those who determined the affairs of the State, and yet he entertained the deepest hatred of government of any kind. It was not the radical Fichte but the sophisticated nobleman Humboldt who developed a theory uncompromisingly hostile to the State. Although Humboldt was later as a Prussian statesman to play an important part in the reconstruction of Prussia, his relation to the State remained unsatisfactory to the end.¹

¹ Cf. S. Kaehler, *Humboldt und der Staat*, *passim*.

Humboldt also, like Kant and Fichte, grew up under the ideas of the Enlightenment. Leibniz, Wolff and Mendelssohn were the philosophic heroes of his youth; from them he learned the art of logical reasoning and adopted belief in reason as the ultimate guide in life. We are not concerned here with Humboldt's philosophical development which Spranger has described in all its ramifications,¹ but with Humboldt the political thinker. Since, however, political thought, as concerned with the ultimate values of society, is closely related to philosophical thought, as concerned with the ultimate values of life, some lines of their interconnection in Humboldt's ideas must be traced.

It has been pointed out above that the most outstanding characteristic of the intellectual movement which found one outlet in the French Revolution was the general decline in the belief in reason. This tendency was even stressed by the fact that Kant and Fichte tried to find a new justification for reason. Humboldt also had been drawn into this current and like most of his contemporaries he had succumbed to the influence of Rousseau, whom he considered primarily as the author of the *Treatise on Equality* and of *Emile* and as the ardent critic of rationalism. Logic, which had formed a large part of his early philosophical studies, now seemed futile to him and the philosophy of Wolff shallow. Like Rousseau in his early period, Humboldt was now convinced that the rationalisation of life destroyed its unity or at least endangered it. In his opinion man was an organic entity and not as in Wolff's philosophy a logical abstraction or a substratum for the application of logical rules. He now said that reason had the capacity of moulding existing matter but not that of producing new matter. In this not only the anti-rational character of his thinking is revealed, but at the same time his dependence on rationalism, which he cannot deny despite all his criticism. He assigned to reason at least the rôle of a moulding principle. In fact, he had no sympathy

¹ "Humboldt und die Humanitätsidee." Cf. also the admirable treatise by Leroux.

with the radical campaign of "Storm and Stress" against reason. It is one of the most characteristic traits of the whole period that the most divergent tendencies co-existed and overlapped. The faith in rationalism had been shattered and all intellectual movements from the "Storm and Stress" to the Romantic movement can be explained as movements of protest against rationalism. And yet in all these counter-movements there remained a good deal of rationalism. That which was common to all these movements and which united thinkers such as Kant and Fichte, Humboldt and the brothers Schlegel was a strong belief in the power of personality. This is the new individualism which in spite of all its emotional traits sought for a rational justification of its aims.

Kant had shown that despotism was incompatible with an ethical system which was governed by the categorical imperative and that the task of the political philosopher was to base afresh the obligation of the individual towards the State on the concept of moral duty. Fichte had in opposition to absolutism stressed the rights of man and openly uttered the threat of revolution. Humboldt attacked enlightened absolutism at its root by denying altogether the possibility of a progressive development according to reason on which absolutism had based its claim. Kant and Fichte in this respect had remained faithful to the ideas of Enlightenment since they believed in a continuous development of mankind and thought themselves able to state generally valid laws for its progress. Humboldt did not share this belief.

Fichte had fought against the claim of the absolute princes to be responsible for the happiness of their subjects, since he saw in the absolute system an encroachment on the sacred rights of the sovereign people. His point of view was political; for Humboldt political questions were of minor importance. Every true politician fights for a certain form of government and for a certain distribution of power in the State; Humboldt was opposed to the State as such, regarding it as the chief impediment to culture. He was the outstanding representative

of a type which the nineteenth century was to produce in great numbers in Germany. He was an Epicurean, and in many ways a gentleman of the eighteenth century, intent on enjoying life, finding satisfaction only in the more subtle pleasures of art and science and he was bored with political problems.¹ "I do not care for politics," he wrote to Goethe in April 1798, and though this was not quite the whole truth it certainly proves that he did not consider politics as the true domain of his activity. The point therefore could well be raised whether the ideas of Humboldt deserve mention at all in a history of political thought. It must be admitted that Humboldt's ideas could be dismissed in a few sentences in a history of systems of political ideas, since they have very little systematic value. But we are convinced that they have a place in a history in which the actual political thought of a period is treated irrespective of its theoretical and systematic value for the political scientist. These ideas are characteristic of the political attitude of the intellectuals of the period. Besides, in the political sphere, any attitude towards political questions, even a negative one, is politically significant. Theories which induce large numbers of the intelligentsia to retreat from politics are just as much of political significance for the historian of political thought as those which cause them to devote themselves to political activity. The outcome of a thorough indifference to political problems might, for instance, increase or stabilise the power of the ruling class, because nobody would be willing to oppose it.

We have pointed out in the first chapter that a far-reaching indifference to the State had set in in Germany after the French Revolution. This is not contradicted by the passionate interest which the Revolution itself had stirred up among the intellectuals. This interest subsided very soon and the Revolution was generally regarded not so much as a reorganisation of the State but as a rebellion of individuals in the name of humanity.

¹ This epicurean attitude is in strange contrast to his philosophic belief that happiness is not the goal of life.

In Humboldt's thought this indifference had grown to an outright hostility against any and every form of State. This was the answer he gave to the absolutism which he hated. Mirabeau had issued a warning against the *fureur de gouverner* and Humboldt significantly used this quotation as a motto for his book on the State.¹ It would, however, be rash to regard this hostility against the State entirely as the outcome of a reaction against absolutism. There were other reasons working in the same direction. In the eighteenth century an intellectual life of high quality had grown up outside the Courts and produced a great number of eminent men, most of whom came from the middle class. The intellectual leaders of the middle class realised that this rich development was not only not patronised by the absolute State but had on the contrary grown up in opposition to it. Frederick the Great's attitude towards German literature is perhaps the most striking example of the lack of understanding for, and of sympathy with, Germany's intellectual life which characterised the absolutist Courts.² The result was a deep estrangement between the political forces as represented by the Courts and the intellectual forces as represented by an independent group of writers. The more self-confident the leaders of the "Augustan Age" in Germany became, the more they retreated from political life. This attitude reached its climax in German Classicism.³ Humboldt, the intimate friend of Goethe and Schiller, was one of the spokesmen of this group of men who saw the essence and aim of life in the cultured individual, especially after they had been disappointed in the development taken by the French

¹ "La difficulté est de ne promulguer que des lois nécessaires, de rester à jamais fidèle à ce principe vraiment constitutionnel de la société, de se mettre en garde contre la fureur de gouverner, la plus funeste maladie des gouvernements modernes." Mirabeau, *Discours sur l'Education Nationale*, p. 6.

² During the eighteenth century most of the German Courts were entirely and exclusively under French influence. The history of the intellectual development of Germany in that period is to a large extent the history of the struggle for liberation from French predominance. The Court of Karl August, though it was of greatest importance, was the exception which proves the rule.

³ See ch. v below.

Revolution.¹ The belief in reason was replaced by the belief in the individual as the upholder of civilisation. The whole of the eighteenth century had been imbued with the belief in reason, but reason, as Cassirer points out, had always been regarded as a capacity rather than a possession.² The individualism of Humboldt and the German Classicists was the logical development of the belief in reason as a creative faculty. This creative faculty was centred in the individual himself who could form the world like a work of art. With this tendency Humboldt combined principles which he took from Kant's idealistic philosophy. "That which makes man intrinsically a thinking and willing being is his intellectual nature. As a sensual being he is dependent on sensual forces, but as an intellectual being he is able to create for himself an ideal of perfection and independence according to which he can live."³ The logical aspect of rationalism was replaced by an ethical one, the mechanical conception of the world by an organic one. Man was no longer a mechanical part of society, but its essence and end. Humboldt followed the way which Shaftesbury had pointed out when he regarded man as a work of art, since man was able to reproduce in his life the harmony of the universe.⁴ Herder and Goethe also saw the whole of the world and the whole of man, who is the world's microcosmic reproduction, as organic entities.

Humboldt repudiated the idea of a continuous progress of mankind as formulated by the rationalist thinkers. In this he was evidently influenced by Rousseau. Like many of his contemporaries he was inclined to call into question the belief of the rationalist thinkers that the prevalence of reason could be detected in the development of the world. He was convinced that the productive individual plays a greater part in history than is accorded to him by those who believe in the reign of

¹ He clearly expressed this attitude in a letter to a woman friend: "In the events of the world and the events which whole states experience, the intrinsically important thing remains that which relates to the activity, the intellect and the feeling of individuals. Man is the centre everywhere and each human being remains in the end solitary." Humboldt's *Briefe an eine Freundin*, vol. i, p. 248. ² *Die Philosophie der Aufklärung*, pp. 15, 16.

³ *Works*, vol. i, p. 59.

⁴ Cf. *Characteristicks*, vol. i, p. 238.

reason. A world exclusively governed by reason seemed to him, the aesthete, too monotonous and he shrank from allowing the variety of real life to be submerged into the monotony of some few rational principles. "We show man altogether too little in history," he wrote to a friend on June 9, 1826. "That which is really everywhere the aim, the particular being of the single individual, is so often in history regarded as means to ends which frequently are only words." In this passage the Kantian who protests against the treatment of man as a means instead of as an end makes himself heard. Like Kant he blamed absolutism for having always regarded man as a means to its ends, thus violating his inborn dignity.

One of the most important concepts of Humboldt's philosophy of history was the concept of "chance." Man is not only the product of known forces which are subject to reason and can therefore be foreseen and controlled, but of inconceivable and unknown forces which Humboldt comprised in the concept of chance. Since these forces and influences are incomprehensible, rational laws for the development of mankind cannot be formulated. According to this standpoint it seems as if the recognition of historical connections would be beyond the reach of human power. In reality, it was the starting-point for a productive method of historical research. Humboldt and his contemporaries had realised where a purely rational concept of history could lead to. In the political sphere the result had been a schematic interference with life which threatened to stifle it and in the sphere of historiography it had produced dry generalisations and apparent misinterpretations. What Humboldt taught was fundamentally nothing but to revere history by doing justice to the facts, to revere above all the productive forces of man, which are working in it. He was convinced, as he wrote to Schiller on November 2, 1796, that "the whole history of mankind could perhaps be described as a natural sequence of revolutions of human energy."

Humboldt's own part in the intellectual development of Germany can be compared with Lessing's part in the sphere

of literature or Winckelmann's in the sphere of aesthetic criticism. Like these thinkers, Humboldt protested against the application of rigid rules and tried to procure liberty for the creative individual in the social sphere. He developed this standpoint clearly in a letter to Forster on June 1, 1792: "My aim, that which I always had before my mind, has been the highest and most proportionate development of all human forces into a whole." This was the programme of humanism as it was put forward by the German Classicists. The Enlightenment had also cherished the ideal of humanity but had understood by it something intrinsically negative: the refutation of prejudice and superstition and the progress of mankind towards felicity through developing rational virtue. The new humanism went deeper. The individual became the mediator of a civilisation which consisted in the complete development of all abilities and forces of man, not only of his rational ones. In the attainment of this goal, art was more important than the State. The essential force of man was something indefinable, and this Humboldt called his spontaneity. Every human being like every nation can develop itself only in a certain direction, which is determined by its inner potentialities, and this development must necessarily always lead to the predominance of one particular potentiality. Nevertheless, men must act under the ideal of totality and endeavour to approximate to it as far as possible even if they never can attain it. According to this doctrine, mankind in its historic development from one one-sidedness to another can at each given moment present only a single aspect of humanity which is its individual contribution to humanity as a whole. In formulating this concept Humboldt seemed to have discarded the belief in progress entirely, but he introduced another concept into his philosophy of history by which he dispensed with the rational idea of progress and retained the concept of development. The development of mankind from one one-sidedness to another, or, in other words, from one stage of humanity to another, does not proceed by jerks but follows the law of continuity. That is to say, each

generation is influenced not only by its own forces and by external unknown factors but also by that which it has taken over as a heritage from the preceding generation. "From the whole history of mankind," so Humboldt formulated this idea in a letter to Schiller, "a picture of the human mind and character can be drawn which resembles no single century and no single nation completely, to which however all have contributed, and to this picture I direct my attention."¹

It can easily be seen that this philosophy of history is a definite advance on that of the *Aufklärung*. It opens the way for a truly historical method of investigation. Humboldt showed that in order to write history it was not sufficient to apply rational norms, but that the forces have to be taken into account by which the actions of men and nations are determined. More important than rational rules constructed by the historian are the facts and, above all, that series of data which Humboldt called tradition. The concept of progress as it was employed by the rationalists was valueless, since it falsely presupposed that men develop according to general laws, and that it was possible to perceive these laws of development. The concept of continuity employed by Humboldt gives scope to the irrational and emotional forces which largely determine the course of history and enable the historian to judge each single period on its own merits. The application of these principles of the philosophy of history to political problems is obvious.

As early as in his work on religion Humboldt had drawn an idealistic picture of the capacity of the individual for development. In this treatise the central concept is *Bildung*,² from which the legislator must start. "The State is nothing but a means to the furtherance of *Bildung*, or rather to the removal of hindrances which would be in its way in a social state."³ The development of man, his education towards civilisation, is the aim, and religion is only one of the means of attaining this

¹ *Correspondence with Schiller*, p. 277.

² *Bildung* is a more or less untranslatable term, it means the actual process of education and at the same time the cultured state of mind arrived at through education.

³ *Works*, vol. i, p. 69.

aim. Humboldt, as must be noticed, maintained in this treatise that the State can have a considerable share in education. "The legislator must nowadays go deeply into the study of man, he must explore everything which may have bearing on the fate and felicity of man, and he must not let any means pass unscrutinised by which the latter is enhanced or lessened."¹ Humboldt already in this stage conceived of a State in which the citizen can remain a human being, that is to say, can strive to fulfil his task of attaining perfect humanity. He demanded that the State should assist the individual in attaining this lofty goal through all the means which are at its disposal.

This faith in the State Humboldt gave up a few years later. In the letter to Forster which we mentioned above, he wrote: "If one expands the activity of the State further (that is to say, further than is necessary for the task of security) one limits initiative in a harmful way, produces monotony and in a word damages the inner development of man."²

Humboldt as a young man of twenty-four years quitted the State service in which a prosperous career seemed to await him, in order to live as a private person pursuing his own interests.³ This step seems symbolic of his hostility towards the State, although there is no documentary evidence that he wished to protest against that Prussia in which men like Woellner governed. He would have quitted the State service under any Government, since politics did not interest him. Political problems were, however, inescapable. The absolutist system had interfered too drastically with the private life of the individual and the reverberations of the Revolution were too strong. In order to understand Humboldt's attitude, we must bear in mind that he was from the beginning, as it were, on the defensive. It was not his aim to bring about a satisfactory

¹ *Works*, vol. i, p. 54.

² The clause in brackets is inserted by the author.

³ It was only owing to financial circumstances that he later joined the service again and only with great reluctance that he, after the collapse of 1806, followed the call of his king to collaborate in the reconstruction of Prussia.

relation between State and individual, but to refute the claims of the State as far as possible. Thus his first consistent political treatise bears the characteristic title: "Ideas for an attempt to determine the limits of the activity of the State."¹ Parts of this treatise were published by Schiller in his review *Thalia* and by Biester in his *Berliner Monatsschrift*.² The book in its entirety, however, was never published during Humboldt's lifetime. The author was at first afraid of difficulties with the Prussian censor, and later, when Schiller had finally succeeded in finding a publisher outside Prussia, he gave up his intention of publishing the book.³ The *Ideen* were not published till 1851, when they strongly impressed John Stuart Mill and stimulated Laboulaye to write an essay on the limits of the State.

There can only be conjectures as to the reasons which caused Humboldt to forgo the publication of his essay. Kaehter assumes that the book was suppressed under the influence of the reading of Burke, without, however, offering evidence for this conjecture.⁴ Probably Humboldt realised very soon that the book could be valued only as a negative protest against absolutism and did not make a positive contribution to the history of political thought. Moreover, Humboldt, who was a clear thinker, could not help realising that his essay contradicted his own train of thought in a strange way. He had assumed that it was impossible to draw an ideal picture of the State, whereas he now himself developed a theory for which he claimed general validity. How little his description could be thought compatible with political reality he realised himself when he asked his readers "to abstain from comparisons with reality as far as possible, with regard to any generalisations which this book contains."⁵

Humboldt's relation to the State seems characteristic of the

¹ *Ideen zu einem Versuch die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit der Staates zu bestimmen.*

² *Berliner Monatsschrift*, 1792, vol. i, p. 84; vol. ii, pp. 346, 419.

³ Cf. *Correspondence with Schiller*, p. 45.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

⁵ *Works*, vol. i, p. 127.

political attitude of most of the educated men of the age. Humboldt and the other representatives of Classicism in Germany found in the study of ancient civilisation the satisfaction which they could not find in the present.¹ In this, also, Rousseau's influence reveals itself. Humboldt himself has pronounced that he wanted to perform the same task for political science which Rousseau had performed for the science of education. As in *Emile* an ideal of education is maintained, according to which the individual is left free in the first place for the development of his own powers, so Humboldt wished to put forward in the sphere of politics a theory according to which the individual is left free in the social sphere. The Classicists believed that in the Greeks they had found a people unhampered in its vitality by the development of civilisation, but developed to a high standard of culture while retaining its originality.² If we understand by a romantic attitude that which glorifies the past at the cost of the present we can count Humboldt amongst the romantics as Professor Kaehler does.³ But Humboldt was not a Romantic in the proper sense of the word, for this requires a strong element of emotionalism and mysticism which he lacked.

Like Kant and Fichte, Humboldt places the concept of freedom in the foreground of his political discussions. His concept of freedom is closely connected with his concept of culture. For him freedom means the possibility for an indefinite and multiple activity which forms the indispensable basis for the development of the human forces and therefore for that of culture. Freedom accordingly is not subjection under the law of reason as with Kant, or a social problem, as with Fichte, or mere independence of government, as with the future liberals, but activity in the service of civilisation. Social

¹ This is illustrated by an interesting passage in a letter of Humboldt to Wolf: "Whether I shall ever return to politics is another question, which I should not like to answer in the affirmative, the Greeks absorb me wholly." *Briefwechsel mit Schiller*, p. 356.

² Cf. Spranger, *Humboldt und die Humanitätsidee*, p. 257.

³ Op. cit., p. 108 ff.

groups and relations interest Humboldt only in so far as they exert a negative or positive influence upon the individual. The centre of gravity of the problem of freedom does not lie in the political organisations, but in the forces of the individual, his *ἐνέργεια*. This explains also his attitude towards war. He believed that even wars are capable of developing the creative power of the individual, and he was accordingly against artificial measures which aimed at preventing wars.

It is very easy to dismiss this belief in man's initiative as utopian and to point out that it does not do justice to the true political situation. It can be understood only if we remember the unbounded optimism which made Humboldt believe "that the best operations of man are those which imitate the operations of nature most faithfully."¹ This strong belief in the creative power of the individual is only another expression of his deep disappointment with the shortcomings of absolutism.

Whereas the thinkers of the seventeenth century had believed in systems, those of the eighteenth century had already estimated individual reason as a creative power higher than systems. Lessing's saying that he preferred the striving for truth to the possession of truth is an example of this attitude. Humboldt followed this tendency when he placed the creative individual in the centre of his concept of the world.

Humboldt's radical concept of freedom seems to lead to a system of anarchism and, in fact, later anarchists have developed quite similar ideas. Nevertheless, Humboldt's concept of freedom is far from being anarchical. His aim is not the unbounded arbitrariness of the individual, but the development of all his forces to a whole in the service of culture. "The true end of man which is prescribed not by vague and transient desire but by the eternal and immutable dictate of reason is the highest and most harmonious development of his forces to a consistent whole," thus he formulated his aim.²

Freedom is the necessary presupposition for the attainment of culture. Only where there is freedom is that variety of

¹ *Works*, vol. i, p. 101.

² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

situations possible in which alone man can thrive. If man lives in a monotonous environment which is regulated by generalising reason, his forces become blunted. Here we notice the aesthetical basis of his concept of the character of man, which comes out most clearly in his attempt to contrast form and matter in a truly Aristotelian way. Form is the spiritual side of things, their idea, matter the sensual side, the material for the idea. Form and matter very often blend, so that in reality their separation is only arbitrary. Often form becomes the material for a higher form as the blossom which is itself a form furnishes the material for the fruit. From this Humboldt concludes that culture which is a development from form to higher form must be left to itself, since the spiritual principle which is inherent in matter as its form will work itself out if it is given full scope.

In Humboldt's opinion the aim of the State can in theory be twofold: positively it can encourage the welfare and happiness of its subjects, or negatively, it can protect them against evil. Humboldt categorically denies to the State in practice the right to promote the welfare of its subjects. In this he was influenced by Kant, who had taught that ethics could not be based on the principle of felicity. For Humboldt the aim of man is not happiness but the complete development of all his powers in the service of civilisation. "*L'homme n'est pas fait pour être précisément heureux, mais pour remplir l'existence telle que le sort l'a lui donnée,*" he wrote to Madame de Staël.

As the State is denied the right to care for the welfare of its citizens, no other task remains for it but to provide for their security. Humboldt even maintained that all institutions of the State which have been created with special regard to the physical well-being of the people, as poor laws, import regulations, etc., can only be disadvantageous, since they induce the people to rely on others instead of on themselves. He was afraid that through them men could at best obtain only goods which they could not put to advantage, since they were not the product of their own activity. Humboldt demanded instead

the "free play of the forces," a formulation which was to become one of the principal catch-words of liberalism.

It is not our task to go into the details of the picture which Humboldt draws of the State as he wishes it to be. This picture can be constructed by applying his fundamental principle that the State should undertake only such tasks as the individual cannot execute himself. "Every attempt of the State to interfere with the private affairs of its citizens is detestable, unless the violation of the right of one person by another is concerned."¹ Security is for Humboldt the assurance of freedom by the law. The citizens are secure if, when exerting the rights which are their due, they are not disturbed by external encroachments.

In his concern for the cultural development of the individuals and in his endeavour to repudiate the encroachments of absolutism, Humboldt completely overlooked that the free play of the forces can only prevail if these forces really exist. In other words, he, like many intellectuals, forgot that the masses of paupers must perish without the aid of the State, since they lacked the power to maintain themselves. It seems indeed rather naïve if he objects to poor laws because they "desecrate human dignity" and if he prefers private charity. This is all the more surprising as we know from his diary how much he was struck by social problems and how deeply he felt for the wretched victims of society on the occasion of a visit to a prison.

Later liberal thinkers realised that this standpoint was untenable and separated themselves from such complete and uncompromising individualism. But this misunderstanding of the social problem shows again how little the intellectual leaders of the nation were really interested in political or social questions. The fact that the theory of liberalism was more concerned with cultural than with social problems is one of the reasons why it never became a popular movement in Germany, but remained confined to the universities and the intellectuals.

¹ *Works*, vol. i, p. 111.

The middle classes were chiefly interested in getting rid of the last remnants of feudalism and in gaining free rein for their economic development. The concept of activity which with Humboldt had a cultural meaning was interpreted by them as freedom for economic activity. Apart from that, they were pleased enough if the State took over the care of the lower classes. Characteristic of this attitude is a passage in Laboulaye's essay: "De qui souffre-t-on, de quoi se plaint-on sur le continent, sinon des entraves, qui gênent l'industrie, le commerce, la pensée, la conscience?"¹ The order of the words in this enumeration is truly revealing.

Humboldt's concept of the State was fundamentally an aesthetic one. He was, above all, afraid of the monotony which prevents man from developing into a whole, into a work of art. In contrast to the rationalistic conception of the world, Humboldt was convinced that men and nations develop themselves organically like plants, that they "grow" since they are parts of nature. And just as it is best to leave plants to themselves and to trust the forces which nature has given them, man should be left to himself and his own initiative as much as possible.² In Humboldt's opinion, it would be injurious to limit the life of the individual too far or, to retain the metaphor, to keep him too much in the atmosphere of a hothouse. The State cannot raise man to a state of perfection, it can only give direction to his forces and thus modify them.

Behind this concept, however, there lies not only an aesthetic but also a philosophic conviction. Humboldt as an idealistic thinker clung to the dualism of intellectual and sensual forces and decidedly preferred the former. Influences exerted upon the individual by the State are in his conviction intrinsically of

¹ *L'Etat et ses limites*, p. 47.

² It is interesting to note how these first intimations of an organic concept are still used to strengthen the position of the individual, whereas later adherents of this theory employed the metaphor of organism in order to submerge the individual entirely into the whole. The latter use of the organic concept is indeed more consistent or fits better into the metaphor, since in a true organism there is little room for independent activity of its members.

a sensual character, since the State can never reach the intellectual and ethical forces of man. The State is characteristically something alien and hostile to the cultured individual. It can at best engender mechanical habits, but never increase the forces of the soul. "All *Bildung* has its origin exclusively in the interior of the soul and can only be occasioned, never produced, by outward activity."¹

In the above-mentioned letter to Forster, Humboldt had also defined his attitude towards the French Revolution. It is not at all surprising that he suspected the Revolution very soon, although he had at first greeted it with hope. Like many of his contemporaries, he saw in it the attempt to transform rational principles into practice. This flatly contradicted his belief in the necessity for an organic development.² Since, according to his conviction, the nation at every moment of its existence displays only one side of total humanity, it can never be ripe to adopt a constitution which is solely based on reason. "You cannot graft constitutions on men like branches on trees."³ In other words, Humboldt, like Burke, demanded that every new order should be connected historically and organically with the old order and should originate in the latter.

Humboldt, however, deviates fundamentally from Burke in his judgment on the Revolution on another point. He was, in contrast to Burke, capable of viewing the Revolution itself as an expression of political forces in their historical context, that is to say, he was able to see the Revolution as an outcome of the specific historical development in France. In this he was quite consistent. The idea of continuity in history necessarily leads to the recognition that everything which happens has historic causes and can be explained by their place in the historic sequence. The strongest criticism which can be made against Burke is that he himself was rationalistic in his judgment on the Revolution. It is astonishing how much more deeply the young thinker in this casual letter realised the problem of the Revolution than the old experienced politician

¹ *Works*, vol. i, p. 61.

² *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

who let himself be carried away by his prejudices. Humboldt recognised clearly one fact which Burke refused to take into account, the depravity of the old régime in France.¹

With deep insight Humboldt realised the danger presented to all modern States by the bureaucracy. "In most States," he said bitterly, "the personnel of the officials and the extent of the offices increases from decade to decade and the liberty of the subjects decreases in proportion."² Nothing was more repulsive to him than red tape and "organisations in which men are neglected for the sake of affairs and forces for the sake of results." He certainly overshot the mark and was unable to realise that a considerable amount of organisation was unavoidable at a time when life had become so complicated.

It is noteworthy that the man who later was to reform the educational system of Prussia and to found the University of Berlin came to deny to the State the right to regulate the system of education. In order to understand this distrust of public education we must bear in mind that Humboldt, like most of the important men of his age, had never enjoyed public education, but was educated by private tutors.

Humboldt's ideas are most productive when he criticises the backward state of penal law and demands more humane penalties. In this he shows himself the progressive-minded man he really was.

It cannot be denied that Humboldt in his attempt to ascribe to the individual the rôle which in his opinion is his due drew a picture of the State which by no means corresponded to political reality. Apart from some minor States, the power of the State even under the absolute system was nowhere wholly unlimited. Humboldt accordingly constructed, as Kaehler remarks, the foe against whom he fought.³ In this, the principal

¹ "The nobility," he wrote with remarkable insight, "united with the ruler in order to suppress the people, and this is the beginning of the perniciousness of the nobility which has always been at the best a necessary evil, and has now become superfluous." (*Works*, vol. i, p. 82.) This sentence was characteristically omitted by the editor of the review in which the letter was published without Humboldt's knowledge.

² *Works*, vol. i, p. 125.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 142.

weakness of this thought reveals itself. It also proves that Humboldt was not concerned in the first place with political questions. The true political thinker tries to recognise the facts and to define his attitude towards them, whereas Humboldt did not proceed from historical reality but drew the chimerical picture of a State against which he could set off his humanistic ideal of the perfect individual better. It has been remarked that the majority of the political thinkers of this time were hostile to the absolutist system, though only few were willing to go as far as Humboldt did. Absolutism, however, still had its advocates. Humboldt had shown the manuscript of his *Ideen* to the coadjutor Dalberg, the friend of Schiller. Dalberg, though intellectually of minor importance, was a man who wanted to place himself at the head of Enlightenment. In 1793 he published a pamphlet on *The true limits of the activity of the State*.¹ In this work, the intellectual importance of which is very small, Dalberg tried to defend benevolent despotism and gave, as can be seen from the title, an answer to Humboldt. In contrast to Humboldt, Dalberg discovered no contradiction between the liberty of the individual and the State. He was nearer to the truth than Humboldt when he maintained that the liberty of the individual is only possible in and through the State. In his opinion the State must take over the education of the subjects and influence directly the general moral standard. The State can and should extend its activity as far as ethics permit it. Humboldt was convinced that morality can only develop if man gives the laws to himself, whereas Dalberg believed that a wise education and legislation favours and trains morality. According to him, the State should propound the true principles of morals which are incorporated in Christian religion and thus shape and lead the moral convictions of its citizens. The State should even care for the diversion of its subjects and patronise the arts. When Dalberg drew this picture of the State he saw himself at the head of a clerical princedom

¹ Leroux has reprinted this pamphlet in the appendix of his book *La theorie du despotisme éclairé chez K. Th. Dalberg*.

to which he was entitled and fancied himself as the wise ruler of the fairy tale. He was still the perfect representative of the Enlightenment and for him the chief end of the State was to promote happiness. It was an irony of fate that this man was to succumb completely to Napoleon and to become in German eyes his obedient and uncritical creature.

An intellectually more important defender of benevolent despotism was Christian Garve, who continued to think in the terms of Natural Law. Although he accepted an original contract as the foundation of the State, he was, like Hobbes, convinced that the people had transferred all natural rights to the ruler. He was the last representative of this theory in which the concept of the original social contract is used for the stabilisation of monarchical power. "The ruler is entrusted with the protection and the welfare of the whole of society which is put under his care."¹ Since Machiavelli, nobody had denied more strongly that morals and politics had anything in common. This view must not be confounded with Kant's and Fichte's attempts to distinguish between moral and legal obligations, they never maintained that legal obligations could flatly contradict moral obligations as did Garve. In his opinion moral laws are only valid for private individuals, not for princes and States, since the latter stand to each other in the relation of the state of nature. Garve employed this doctrine in justifying the policy of Frederick the Great, a problem which was especially urgent for him as a Silesian and an ardent admirer of the Prussian king at the same time. His theory in fact was a theory of *raison d'état* inasmuch as it exempted the rulers from the duty of abiding by moral laws. The State or its ruler can do what is considered useful for the welfare of the commonwealth, irrespective of moral obligations. At the same time, Garve was ultra-conservative. In his opinion the laws of property were created "in order that he who is rich shall remain so and the poor remain poor."² His chief principle of the art of

¹ *Abhandlung über die Verbindung der Moral mit der Politik*, p. 5.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 68.

governing is: "Alter nothing in your relation with your people, in the relation of your people with others, unless you are forced to do so by necessity or by extraordinary events."¹

Voices like those of Garve remained almost unheard, and it was theories of this kind which Humboldt intended to attack when he wrote his essay on the sphere and duties of a Government.

Humboldt's ideas have later been claimed by the liberals. In order to be able to consider whether Humboldt was a liberal or not we must first try to define the notion of liberalism. We shall have to come back to this difficult problem when we discuss the development of liberalism in Germany. For the present it may suffice to say that one characteristic seems to be common to all movements which we are used to call liberal; they all try to push back the power and influence of the State for the sake of the liberty of the individual. This tendency can roughly be formulated in the following way: while the conservative thinker and the socialist thinker proceeds from the concept of authority, the liberal thinker proceeds from the concept of autonomy.²

Humboldt had his point of departure in common with the liberals: the protest against enlightened or unenlightened absolutism. But apart from this, he had no relation with the liberal movement as it developed historically after the wars of liberation in Germany. This movement was a movement of the middle class which demanded its share in the government, since it realised that the rights of the individual, his autonomy, would be best safeguarded if the State was controlled by as many individuals as possible. The liberal movement, in other words, was forced to unite itself with democratic elements. Humboldt, however, was no democrat, and the despotism of

¹ *Abhandlung über die Verbindung der Moral mit der Politik*, p. 78.

² This is essentially consistent with the definition which is given by Ruggiero: "The conviction that liberty arouses energy, trust and content, and creates a spontaneous spirit of association and co-operation is characteristic of all liberal parties worthy of the name." Ruggiero, *The History of European Liberalism*, p. 359.

the majority seemed just as distasteful to him as the despotism of a prince. "Properly speaking," he wrote to Schiller on December 7, 1792, "free constitutions do not seem to me so important and salutary. A moderate monarchy on the whole puts far less straitening fetters on the education of the individual."¹ His starting-point was not political liberty as the presupposition for economic progress, but the free individual as the presupposition for a civilisation which was imbued with the ideals of the ancient world.

There is another point which marks a fundamental difference between his views and those put forward by nineteenth-century liberals. The latter demanded constitutions because they realised that constitutions would limit the power of the prince and safeguard the claims of the middle class for liberty. Humboldt, as has been shown, distrusted constitutions because he was afraid that they would limit the activities of the productive individual with whom he was primarily concerned.

Humboldt's liberalism was an aristocratic liberalism.² This is the reason why his political ideas have remained fundamentally unproductive. When Humboldt's *Ideen* were finally published, only their negative side was understood, their protest against the omnipotence of the State and their positive ideal of culture was no longer taken into account. Chapman wrote in the *Westminster Review* of 1854 with reference to Humboldt's book: "Government can only order its business in relation to the truth already discovered and interests already established; but when true manhood is active, new truth is constantly appearing and new interests are ever being created."³ The concept of culture was replaced by that of the relativity of

¹ *Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Humboldt*, p. 49.

² In his book *W. v. Humboldt und das Problem des Judenthums*, Grau makes the attempt to prove that Humboldt's liberalism was due to Jewish influence upon him. In order to characterise the method of this scholar we need quote only one example. Grau points out that Humboldt became anti-Christian under the influence of some Jewish friends. Grau, however, completely overlooks the fact that German Classicism was essentially pagan.

³ P. 473.

truth and only an optimistic belief in progress remained which had already characterised the period of Enlightenment.

It has been mentioned that John Stuart Mill was influenced by Humboldt. He placed a quotation from Humboldt's book at the beginning of his *Essay on Liberty*, and acknowledged his indebtedness to him in various passages.^{1, 2} The question why Mill was fascinated by Humboldt is interesting not only for the understanding of Mill's own thought but also for that of Humboldt.³

When Mill read Humboldt's essay, that is to say after 1851, a considerable change in his philosophic and political views had already taken place. He had freed himself from the crude form of Utilitarianism as presented by Bentham and he was in search of a principle which was to bring his belief in happiness as the final goal of man into accordance with social facts. He had learned to realise "that in the imperfect state of the world the happiness of others may best be served by the absolute sacrifice of the happiness of the individual."⁴ Happiness, however, was no longer equivalent to pleasure but was the fulfilment of the task of developing all one's forces into the integral whole of personality. This principle he found in Humboldt. Mill's attitude towards the German idealist thinkers was not entirely free from doubts. He defended them determinedly, as, for instance, in his correspondence with Auguste Comte, but he repudiated what he called their mysticism with the same determination. Towards Humboldt his attitude was uncritical, but in this case also he, the eclectic *par excellence*, took over only what seemed to fit into his own train of thought.

¹ "The grand leading principle, towards which every argument unfolded in these pages directly converges, is the absolute and essential importance of human development in its richest diversity."

² Cf. Everyman edition of the *Essay on Liberty*, pp. 115, 130, 158; The World's Classics edition of the *Autobiography*, pp. 216, 217.

³ As far as we can see, this question has not been treated by any scholar who has worked on Mill. Lindsay, for instance, does not even mention Humboldt's name in his introduction to the Everyman edition, neither does Crane Brinton in his *English Political Thought in the XIX Century*.

⁴ Cf. Lindsay's introduction, p. xiii.

He did not give up his fundamental belief that happiness was the goal of life, an idea which was wholly alien and repulsive to Humboldt the disciple of Kant. Humboldt's concept of freedom and individuality were parts of his aesthetic system, of his belief that culture was the essence and end of life. Humboldt forbade the State to interfere with the affairs of the individual because he saw culture endangered by such interference. Mill saw in Humboldt's concept of individuality as "the harmonious development of all forces" the guarantee for happiness. In his opinion, only he is happy who can develop all his forces unhampered by external interference, and only the State is perfect in which the greatest variety of life is guaranteed which ensures such development to the individual. In his attempt to safeguard the sacred right of individuality Mill, at least at times, adopted Humboldt's organic concept of the nature of man. "Human nature," so he wrote in striking resemblance to Humboldt's formulations, "is not a machine to be built after a model and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing."¹

The older Utilitarians, such as Bentham and James Mill, had seen in freedom only a means to the attainment of the goal of happiness. For them the problem of freedom consisted in the independence of man from the absolutist rule of the privileged classes. For Mill, freedom was not a means to happiness but happiness itself. He had experienced that the problem of freedom emerged not only under absolutism, but also, perhaps even to a greater extent, in a democracy. In a time in which great democracies had become reality and in which in spite of the control of the government through the people, encroachments on the private sphere of the individual happened constantly, the question of the limits of the power of the State was more burning than ever. That is why Mill was so strongly impressed by the argument of Humboldt, who defended the

¹ Loc. cit., p. 117.

right of the individual against any power of the State, even in a democracy. Humboldt; however, was more consistent since he was no democrat and was concerned not with happiness but with culture. Mill's argument suffered from the fact that in spite of all doubts he was a democrat and that, as the hard facts proved, the happiness of the majority could only be furthered by very considerable encroachments on the sphere of the freedom of the individual. Mill tried to reconcile the principle of liberty with the necessity of interference by distinguishing between the personal and the social sphere, the first being the sphere in which no possible interests of others could be affected, the latter that of social relations. In his opinion interference was only justified in the social sphere, never in the personal, in which he was inclined to include all cultural activity. From his individualistic standpoint he was unable to realise that this distinction was untenable. He believed that "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will is to prevent harm to others."¹ He overlooked, however, that almost every action and even mere facts enter in the sphere of social relations and can be harmful to another person. The fact, for instance, that some persons are in possession of the means of production, whereas the great majority are dependent on them, can make the theoretical freedom of the majority wholly illusory. Humboldt was not interested in this problem and had no need to concern himself with it since culture can thrive if only the few geniuses can develop themselves undisturbed. He was therefore quite consistent when he repudiated any interference, and he would have taken the risk that the happiness of the majority suffered from the inactivity of the State. Mill, however, concerned with the happiness of man, and yet realising that non-interference very often prevented many members of society from becoming happy, involved himself in insoluble contradictions.²

The way in which Mill understood Humboldt was the way in which liberals used to interpret him, and the two thinkers

¹ Loc. cit., p. 73.

² Cf. Lindsay's introduction, especially p. xiv.

are interesting examples of the development of the middle class in the period from the conception of the *Ideen* to their final publication. They represent two distinct phases in the development of European liberalism. In the time of the French Revolution the middle classes felt revolutionary towards the State, even if they were not inclined to revolutionary acts in Germany. Their intellectual leaders raised the demand for freedom and claimed that they were the genuine representatives of culture. In the first place, therefore, they demanded freedom from a State, which seemed only to hamper their cultural activity. The middle classes translated liberty in the cultural sphere into economic and political liberty. When their chief demands had been granted and they had obtained a considerable share in government they tried to protect themselves against the rising masses of the proletariat, who in their turn demanded a share in the distribution of wealth. Thus the liberals were forced to fight against two fronts. On the one hand, they continued to fight against the authoritative pretensions of the bureaucracy, on the other hand they struggled against the complete fulfilment of democracy which would have given control of the machine of State to the unpossessing classes and would have endangered their own social position. Thinkers such as Mill tried to justify the social situation about which they felt strong misgivings by showing an unlimited faith in the capacity of mankind for development. They were sincerely convinced that the world in the long run would develop best if one left as great a scope as possible to the individual, and they regarded obvious social injustices as the inevitable phenomena of a transitional period. This belief held good as long as economic conditions went on improving, it was bound to fail when the conflict between legal liberty and economic dependence turned out to be insoluble. As long as the belief in the omnipotence of the individual was unshaken the thinkers could imagine that all was well when free discussion was guaranteed. When Mill wrote the *Essay on Liberty* the issue was no longer to protect the individual against absolutism,

but to give him security in a society in which he was in danger of falling a victim to strong economic powers. Mill tried to check these forces by elaborating a system of public control which can well be called socialistic, or at least collectivistic. His fatal error consisted in his attempt to maintain at the same time a concept of freedom the first characteristic of which was the negative principle of non-interference. Nevertheless, there was a very strong point in Mill's position. Mill foresaw the development towards socialism and was afraid that this development would sacrifice the principle of personal happiness and make the world a well-functioning but monotonous mechanism. Mill was an intellectual, and as such was concerned with the beauty of free thought and the thrill of intellectual adventure. He was also a relativist and therefore assigned to the "half-truths" an important part in the building up of the intellectual life which would be starved if it were governed by one truth only. That is the reason why the most impressive and convincing passages in Mill's writings are those in which he defends freedom of discussion.

How little Humboldt was concerned with political reality can best be illustrated by his attitude towards the national question. Although he had an important share in the reconstruction of Prussia after the great collapse in 1806, he had no understanding of the problem of German unity. He was convinced that the German could develop a national consciousness only in his particular State and that his initiative would be crippled if he were to be incorporated into a whole which had no meaning for him.¹ We need only read his memoranda on the question of a constitution in Germany in order to see how detached he felt towards the problem of German unity, though he showed considerable political insight when he pointed out that the unification of Germany presupposed the settlement of the relation between Austria and Prussia. He did not realise, however, the intrinsic importance of the question of the constitution when he wrote: "Constitutions belong to the things of

¹ *Works*, vol. ii, p. 101.

which there are few in life, the existence of which one perceives but the origin of which one never quite understands and which one cannot imitate.”¹ This quotation shows that Humboldt still mistrusted the desirability of active political exertion without which the problems which confronted Germany during the nineteenth century could not be solved.

When Humboldt had finally quitted the State service he devoted his life to linguistic and philosophic studies and his correspondence contains hardly any political remarks or even traces that he was interested in the course of political events. One utterance is highly characteristic of his political aloofness. When in 1819 his friend Welcker had got into difficulties with his Government, on account of his liberal views, and told Humboldt that he had to suffer a domiciliary visit and a confiscation of his private papers, Humboldt expressed his regret, but coolly added: “On the other hand, the circumstances of the time urge the Governments to careful supervision.”² It was the time of the darkest reaction in Germany.

In one respect Humboldt pointed the way to the future. He was one of those men in Germany who had realised that the warnings of the French Revolution had to be taken into account and that the people must be given some share in the management of public affairs. Thus he developed not the idea of democracy but that of self-government. “In order to bring about the transition from the present state of affairs to the new one which has been decided upon we ought to let every reform proceed as far as possible from the ideas and heads of men.”³ Humboldt had come to the conviction that it was the task of the citizen as an active member of the community to participate in the foundation and protection of the public order. Through this participation in the whole the morality of the individual is in Humboldt’s view increased inasmuch as the citizen by directing his activity towards the welfare of his fellow-citizens imparts a special moral value to his own actions.

Humboldt’s idea of self-government was no longer in

¹ *Works*, vol. ii, p. 99. ² *Letters to Welcker*, p. 45. ³ *Works*, vol. i, p. 239.

accordance with his original radical individualism. It was a decided step towards a more positive concept of the State which was urged upon him by the development of the political events which preceded and followed the wars of liberation. His argument was clearly that if there was to be an increasing activity of the State, this ought to be as much as possible the activity of the citizens themselves.

Leading men of the age acknowledged that the citizens ought to be given a certain share in government, and it was on this conviction that the reconstruction of Prussia was partly based. Hardenberg remarked in a memorandum of 1807 "that the natural liberty must not be limited further than is absolutely necessary." Stein declared in his *History of the period from 1789 till 1799* that "the importunate interference of the authorities in affairs of private persons and municipalities ought to stop and ought to be replaced by the activity of the citizen who does not live by forms and paper but acts vigorously." And Scharnhorst wrote to Clausewitz in 1807: "We must instil into the nation the feeling of independence, we must give its members occasion to make themselves acquainted with each other and to take their affairs in hand."¹

Humboldt's concept of the State was a typical product of this time of transition. It was the merit of absolutism to have created the centralisation without which the modern State could not carry out its tasks, but the modern State could only come into existence if the middle classes participated actively in politics. For this purpose they had first to be freed from the fetters of absolutism in order to learn to use their own powers. Humboldt did not recognise the historic merit of absolutism and he did much to evoke the powers which were to change it fundamentally in the nineteenth century. Kant's idea of the State as subject to the rule of law, Fichte's rights of man and Humboldt's idea of self-government were the material for the political thought of the middle classes in the nineteenth century in Germany.

¹ *Scharnhorsts Briefe*, edited by K. Linnebach, Munich, 1914, p. 334.

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CHAPTER V

THE CLASSICISTS

WE remarked in the introduction that the ideas of the systematic political thinkers are not a sufficient basis for obtaining a faithful picture of the political thought of a period. It is quite possible that in reality these ideas had no influence or only very little. It can certainly be said that the ideas which have been described in the foregoing chapters exerted very little influence on the actual political events of 1789-1800. The reason for this is that the government was in the hands of a small class which was sharply divided both socially and intellectually from the other classes of the population. The influence of Kant and Fichte was not to appear until the men who were their pupils were taken into partnership by the Governments, that is, until the middle classes had established their position in the State.

That the middle classes became conscious of their importance in the State they owe in a great measure to those men who led German literature out of the depths of a feeble imitation of English and French models to a position of European significance. It cannot be doubted that the influence of these men on their contemporaries was very great, but for us it is more important that the works of these poets and writers were to be read in the following century in all schools, and were to form one of the foundations of education. It is therefore necessary to find out what their political views were, even if they brought no notable contribution to the history of political thought. They were all contributors to or editors of periodicals which were read by educated people, and we may assume that a great proportion of their contemporaries, at least of the intellectuals, thought as they did on political questions. Wieland's periodical *Der deutsche Merkur*, for instance, though not so widely distributed as some English periodicals of the time

in England, was an influential organ in which political questions were extensively discussed.¹

The chief of the great German writers of that time were Lessing, Wieland, Herder, Goethe and Schiller, who are usually described as the Classicists. Lessing falls outside our scope, because his work preceded the outbreak of the French Revolution, and of Herder we shall have to speak in connection with the Romantic movement. Wieland, Goethe and Schiller are, in their political ideas, characteristic representatives of the various groups of the bourgeoisie. Wieland, the son of a country clergyman, represents the enlightened middle class; Goethe, the son of a rich imperial official and descendant of one of the ruling families of Frankfort, represents the upper middle class, which considered itself equal to the aristocracy; Schiller, the son of a poor military doctor, represents the lower middle class, which was still completely under the influence and power of the prince.

One thing can be said immediately: none of the German Classicists developed a political system, or even expressed political ideas of importance. It was a bad omen for the future development of Germany that the celebrated spiritual leaders of the nation, the most prominent representatives of the middle classes, revealed a remarkable *naïveté* with regard to political questions. For this reason, too, it is not surprising that the middle class revolution of 1848 was to fail, spiritually ill-prepared as it was. The decisive political forces which brought about the unification of Germany and of which Bismarck was the representative, had little or no connection with German Classicism. The "spirit of Weimar" was not beaten in 1933; it was beaten a long time before the "spirit of Potsdam" had even begun its work of unification.

Among the German Classicists, Wieland was undoubtedly the one who was most interested in political questions. He took a passionate interest in the political events of the time, especially

¹ It is noteworthy that even the *Deutsche Merkur* had a circulation of only 2,000 copies.

in the French Revolution, and he tried to define his attitude towards the most important political currents in his own country. Treitschke has called him the only politician among the Classicists.¹

Wieland was more completely under the domination of the Enlightenment than any of the other Classicists.² In his political novel *Der goldene Spiegel*, he had set up a monument to the enlightened absolutism of a Frederick the Great or a Joseph II and praised their methods of government as an expression of the greatest political wisdom. Here Wieland was doubtless in agreement with the majority of his educated contemporaries. The German middle classes looked upon enlightened absolutism as the only instrument for a continued healthy development of social life and liked to regard rulers like Frederick the Great as representatives of political progress. Frederick was celebrated not only for his military exploits, but also for his claim to have created independent justice and protected the rights of the poor. Anecdotes tending to show this are still to be found in all German school-books. This attitude, too, is characteristic of the middle classes. The German middle classes, unlike the English, did not struggle for their freedom against the monarchy, but expected, rather, protection from the latter.

Wieland had the optimism of the petty bourgeois. In the philosophical field this was expressed in the form of a serene eclecticism and a pleasure-loving eudaimonism. Wieland had nothing of Kant's ethical rigour, for him the aim of life was to make men happy. "Politics is the science of happiness in civilised society." Wieland fully agreed with this view expressed by D. E. in the *Deutsche Merkur*.³ His conviction that man is

¹ Treitschke, *Deutsche Geschichte im XIX Jahrh.*, vol. ii, 404.

² His concept of the end of the State is that the State ought to create and secure general happiness. "The whole aim of mankind can be nothing else than to further the human race step by step until all men become only one family and have no other ruler than general reason. Thus there would be established the purest and most perfect monarchy and at the same time the freest, best ordered and happiest republic which could be conceived." *Works*, vol. xlvi, p. 72.

³ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1793, 12, p. 369.

by nature a social creature was united to a belief that sociability implies happiness. "Originally barbarism ruled. The social instinct drew man out of this unworthy condition and led him to his true destination in the State, to become as happy as possible."¹

When Wieland stressed the social character of man he was in agreement, not only with Shaftesbury, but also with other thinkers, such as Kant and Fichte. It is also, of course, possible to see in this the influence of Rousseau, which, however, is remarkably slight in Wieland. But it seems more correct to see in it the awakening of the consciousness of the middle class, which wanted a free hand for its economic and intellectual activities and therefore had to proclaim the reasonableness of a social order in which the individual would be allowed a wide scope.

Wieland's political ideas, like those of the whole middle class of his time, were influenced not only by the image of Frederick the Great and Joseph II, but also by the experience he had of other less well-intentioned representatives of enlightened absolutism. Wieland was never tired of denouncing the excesses of absolutism or of fighting the power of tyranny. Wieland came, like Schiller, from Württemberg, where tyranny had assumed particularly bad forms, but his was a different nature from Schiller's. We find in him neither those passionate outbursts as in Schiller's *Räuber* nor that destructive criticism of the immorality of Courts as in *Kabale und Liebe*. Wieland was not a dramatist, his field was that of irony and the allegorical novel, and he fought against tyranny with more subtle weapons than Schiller. He was therefore the first great political satirist, the representative of a type which is not very widespread in Germany, and in which Börne and Heine were to follow him.²

We find in Wieland one particularly strongly marked trait

¹ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1792, 3, p. 402.

² It is a curious fact that the breakdown of the Holy Roman Empire stimulated very little satire. This can be attributed to lack of humour inherent in Germans, but it seems more correct to see in it the weakness of the political consciousness in Germany.

which is characteristic of the middle class in general, a profound mistrust of all violent changes and an inveterate horror of all revolutions. He was convinced that Germany was particularly unsuited for revolutions. This, too, was a generally accepted idea. "Germany," wrote Reinhold in 1790, "is of all European states the most fitted for revolutions of the mind and the least fitted for political revolutions."¹

Wieland regarded revolutions as unnecessary and therefore harmful, because, as a philosopher of Enlightenment, he was convinced that the world grows better and better the more the spirit of the Enlightenment spreads. "Mankind in Europe has come of age," he wrote triumphantly in 1793.² This attitude seems to be in contradiction to his enthusiasm for the French Revolution and, in fact, this enthusiasm soon changed to disappointment and hatred. Wieland was at first inclined, like most of his contemporaries, to look upon the French Revolution as a spiritual movement which would fulfil certain liberal demands. He tried at first to accept its violent and bloody accompaniments by regarding them as a passing reaction to relentless oppression. "The movements of a people brought to desperation," he wrote with profound historical insight, "are violent by nature, and no one can be held responsible for their consequences but he—or those—who by unreasonable and tyrannical measures drove the people to this desperation."³ He still saw in the Revolution an attempt to set up the rule of reason. He worked himself up to panegyrics, such as: "I abandon myself to the delightful feeling of joy which must stir the heart of every citizen of the world who cares for the good of mankind, as he thinks that he has lived until this epoch, for now the most cultivated nation of Europe is giving to the world a great example of legislation which, based as it is solely and entirely on the rights of man and the true interest of the nation, is, in all its parts and articles, the unmistakable expression of reason."⁴ With many measures put

¹ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1790, p. 232.

³ *Works*, vol. xli, p. 5.

² *Ibid.*, 1793, p. 5.

⁴ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1790, p. 321.

into practice by the revolutionaries, as, for instance, the abolition of the monasteries, he was in complete agreement.¹

Wieland could assume this attitude all the more easily because it never occurred to him at all that this movement might spread into Germany. Like most of his contemporaries,² he was convinced that the social conditions in France were incomparably worse than those in his own country, so that, for this very reason, a revolution was not to be feared in Germany. "Has not the German nation already possessed for a long time all that the French hoped to gain through a revolution?" he asked in 1791.³ This, too, is a characteristic trait of the liberal bourgeoisie. The liberals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often looked upon revolutionary movements in other countries with a sympathy which was in inverse ratio to the possibility of a revolution in their own country. When the Revolution went beyond Wieland's liberal demands and threatened to spread to Germany, when the affluent calm of the German philistine was disturbed by the news of the Terror, the attitude of the German middle classes, including that of Wieland, was fundamentally changed. Wieland became angry with the Revolution which seemed to have no use for his philosophy of moderation. "A people which wants to be free," he wrote furiously in 1791, "and has not learned after two years that freedom without unconditional and unlimited obedience to the laws is a monstrosity in theory and in practice an infinitely more harmful and noxious condition than Asiatic slavery, such a people is, to put it mildly, not yet ripe for freedom."⁴ It was a long time before Wieland allowed himself to admit this. Clearly it was hard for him to give up his conviction that the Revolution was an achievement of philosophy, and in spite of his later hostility to the Revolution he never lost sight of its historical importance as many of its critics

¹ He was convinced that this measure would produce "immensely salutary results for agriculture, growth of population, education and even for religion itself." *Deutsche Merkur*, 1790, p. 321.

² Cf. Forster's opinion above, p. 23.

³ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1791, 7, p. 435.

⁴ *Works*, vol. xli, p. 175.

tended to do.¹ He always exhorted his contemporaries to learn from it: "What has been happening in France for four years, and is still happening, can and must serve not as an example to us, but as a warning to the princes and the peoples."²

Wieland's chief political concept was that of freedom. Like the exponents of Natural Law and like Kant, he defined the concept of freedom in a formal manner. The freedom of each may be limited only so far as is necessary to prevent him from menacing the lawful freedom of others.³ He did not differentiate very clearly between what he called freedom according to law and freedom of the sophists. The former is necessary for the fulfilment of the aim of the State, the latter is "a utopian demand, mere orators' chatter."⁴ Apparently he understood by lawful freedom the demand that interference in the private sphere should take place only when sanctioned by a law, whereby he raised a typical liberal demand. His point of departure was the individual, who is by nature a social being, and whose good is the highest aim of the State. The State gradually arose in the course of history, because the individuals united first into families, then into larger groups. The idea of a social contract is not compatible with this historical, organic idea of the growth of the State and Wieland was therefore logical when he called Rousseau's *Contrat Social* "a hypothesis which history contradicts." He used the social contract only as an orator's phrase, as, for instance, when he exclaimed in the *Göttergespräch*, with regard to the French Revolution: "The social contract, without which the State is held together not as a living, organic body but only as a skeleton bound together with wire, is to be made to-day for the first time."⁵

Wieland ever and again preached moderation. As a true liberal, he wished always to take the golden mean and he was convinced that the business of politics was to avoid extremes

¹ When Schubart charged him with having forsaken the cause of liberty he declared that "he had no intention of being unfaithful to the cause of true liberty and the rights of man." Hansen, loc. cit., i, p. 846.

² *Deutsche Merkur*, 1793, p. 90.

⁴ *Works*, vol. xli, pp. 61, 235.

³ *Ibid.*, 1793, 12, p. 371.

⁵ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1790, 9, p. 64.

if it was to attain its end of making men happy. Politics, therefore, must not go further in its demands "than the enlightened man finds necessary."¹

But an enlightened State is, in his opinion, one in which law rules. The source of law is the general reason. The belief of the middle classes in the rule of law is comprehensible as a reaction against the unbounded arbitrariness of the absolute princes. The middle classes wanted order and security, without which they could not follow their occupations.

The laws were intended, above all, to guarantee the right of property and, in fact, we see that Wieland regarded the protection of property as one of the most important tasks of the State. He was one of the first in Germany to stand for the protection of copyright and demand that the unauthorised reprinting of works should be forbidden by law.²

Freedom, for him, did not mean that every man could do as he wished, but was only possible if he was subject to law. "Every people has an inalienable right to as much freedom as can co-exist with the necessary order. Freedom with subordination, and subordination with freedom are the most necessary conditions for the well-being of every people."³

Wieland was no democrat, and he was convinced that it was ridiculous "to jabber about the majesty of the people."⁴ Although he was against the privileges of the aristocracy and approved of the abolition of their privileges in France, he nevertheless held firmly to the belief that class distinctions must be upheld for the good of the people. "What nonsense it would be," he wrote in *Der goldene Spiegel*, "to let it depend on the wisdom or whims of minors, what laws they would obey, under what conditions, and for how long!"⁵ He shared the contempt of the petty bourgeois for the common people "who will always be stupid."

¹ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1793, 12, p. 373.

² *Ibid.*, 1785, 11, p. 154.

³ *Ibid.*, 1789, 4, p. 55.

⁴ "The most detestable of all governments is that in which the rabble plays the sovereign." *Neuer Deutscher Merkur* Oct. 1792, p. 192.

⁵ *Works*, vol. xvii, p. 167.

In his political novel, his ideal was that of a patriarchal monarchy in which the king would simultaneously exert the legislative and executive power. Later he adopted Montesquieu's principle of the separation of the powers, without giving up the patriarchal character of the monarchy. Here, too, Wieland merely voiced the opinion of the great majority of his contemporaries. All the political thought of this period in Germany gives the impression of a certain puerility and it is not surprising that the monarch was looked upon as a sort of father. The impulse to political self-consciousness was too slight for mature political thought.

The more Wieland was repelled by the French Revolution, the more he turned in admiration to England and its Constitution. He, too, had first paid his tribute to the universal adoration of America of which we spoke in the first chapter. This interest had given way before the interest in the French Revolution. After he had realised that the French Revolution brought about not merely a reform but a thorough transformation of social relations, he thought he had found in England a Constitution in which conservative and liberal elements were mixed in a satisfactory manner. Wieland's knowledge of English constitutional relations was, however, extremely inadequate. Most Continental thinkers after Montesquieu had contented themselves with idealising the English Constitution without troubling about the facts. Thus it is somewhat amusing to see that Wieland in his *Göttergespräch* makes Queen Elizabeth ask for a Constitution "in which the rights of all classes of citizens are clearly and definitely expressed and protected by suitable institutions against any arbitrary interference."¹

Wieland's political ideas were vague and indefinite. Fundamentally, he did not take up a firm position towards the decisive questions, but, from a sentimental striving for universal happiness, he attempted to mediate between the extremes. Wholly in accordance with his tradition, he was a believer in absolute

¹ *Works*, vol. xl, 408.

monarchy, and he followed in this the classical French ideas, as represented by Bossuet, Saint Simon and Fénelon. Monarchy was in his opinion "the natural form of government." His only effort was to guard against the dangers which, as he well knew, are peculiar to the absolute form of government. Thus his ideal was that of equilibrium between the various political forces.¹ "The political good of the Constitution consists in preventing any part of the government from abusing its power without harming itself."² Here, as elsewhere, it is evident that he was convinced that self-interest was the most effective factor in social and political life. Yet he drew no practical conclusions from his demand for the equilibrium of the Powers. His ideal was a strong central Power, and when he spoke of equilibrium he did not give the word the sense which the liberals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have attached to it, according to which equilibrium is a complicated system of controls and hindrances. For Wieland it was only another expression of his belief that the one thing needful was to allow reason to govern in the State, in order to further the progress of mankind.

Wieland's political ideas have much in common with those of the physiocrats who had translated the ideas of the Enlightenment into economic principles. Like them, he regarded the peasants as the true foundation of civilised society, even though he believed in an equal encouragement of all economic functions.³ The physiocrats had also looked upon inequality as a social necessity and ascribed to the State the task of preventing excessive inequality.⁴ Just as the physiocrats, despite their individualistic point of departure, demanded a strong power in the State, Wieland demanded that all power should be united in the monarch. The chief aim of the State was to protect the freedom and property of the subjects. "The final aim," he wrote, "which a Government must seek to attain in every civilised society, is not so much the greatest possible well-

¹ *Works*, vol. xli, p. 71.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. xvii, p. 226.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xl, p. 374.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56; cf. *op. cit.*, p. 201 ff.

being of the whole, as universal security, that is, the private security of each separate member of the society against all kinds of infringements of his human and civil rights, a security which is the foundation of all human happiness, and is, though not the only, still the foremost aim of civilised society."¹ He was also in agreement with the physiocrats when they considered large states as desirable.

A contemporary gave Wieland this praise: "He has the merit of having drawn the attention of our princes to their duties and of their subjects to their rights."² That characterises excellently Wieland's political attitude. He was not a revolutionary, preaching violence and upheaval, but a kind old gentleman who persuasively pleaded with all parties not to lose sight of the common interest and to acknowledge the rights of reason. He was, like all liberals, in favour of the freedom of the Press, the palladium of civilised society, as he, like Kant, called it, because he believed that social evils would disappear if they could be discussed without hindrance. Like most of the moderate members of the middle class he was still convinced that the Holy Roman Empire was, in spite of its faults, the appropriate organisation for Germany.

Bauer, in his book on the French Revolution, judged Wieland as a political thinker very harshly: "Wieland did not know the world or history. In his well-meant enthusiasm for the French Revolution he expressed the views and feelings of the middle classes of his people, who, beyond the limited scope of their own homes, knew only the world of fiction."³ This judgment is certainly exaggerated. Wieland had an idea of the historical development of the State according to necessary and natural laws and we even find in him suggestions of an organic concept of the State. Wieland's weakness, which he shared with all the members of his class at this time, consisted in his in-

¹ *Works*, vol. xli, p. 377.

² Quoted in Vogt, *Die politischen Ideen Wielands*, p. 60.

³ Loc. cit., p. 44.

ability to decide on a clear political course. "My natural inclination," he wrote in the year 1800, "to look at everything (persons and things) from all sides and from every possible point of view and a cordial abhorrence of excessively one-sided judgments and partisanship, is an essential part of my individuality. It is actually impossible for me to adopt a party altogether."¹ This attitude, of which the catchword was *toutes les choses d'ici-bas ont deux faces*, was typical of the whole social class from which Wieland sprang.

Goethe came from an entirely different social sphere. He was born, not, like Schiller and Wieland, as the subject of a petty absolute prince, but as a citizen of the free Imperial city of Frankfort. This city had preserved something of the ancient culture which had flourished in the German towns until the end of the Middle Ages and had developed a wealthy and proud citizen class. Moreover, Goethe belonged to the ruling class itself. It is true that his father had withdrawn obstinately from political life, but his maternal grandfather was a sheriff and burgomaster of the city of Frankfort and the young Goethe could sun himself in the prestige of his family. We possess Goethe's masterly account of the political conditions of his native town in his autobiography and gain the impression that those who lived there were an intelligent and hard-working class of artisans, business people and burghers, who enjoyed life and had a freer critical eye for social matters than other classes in Germany. It is true that the town was governed by a small group of patricians and that there were, as Goethe himself reports, only too often intrigues and corruption. Nevertheless, the citizens were spared the evils which despotism brought to the petty Courts, and they were therefore accustomed to measure political relations more freely. Above all, Frankfort was free from that class of servants of the princes who were dependent on the favour of their masters and who looked down contemptuously on all other classes. In a word, there was in Frankfort, in contrast to many other parts of Germany, a

¹ *Deutsche Merkur*, 1800, I, p. 256.

healthy middle class. Thus Frankfort was to play an important part in the middle-class revolution of 1848.¹

Goethe's political convictions were influenced by yet another circumstance of his life history. He was the only great German writer of the eighteenth century who never in his life had to struggle with material cares. He was not, like Schiller, dependent on the favour of a petty tyrant, nor had he, like Fichte, to earn his living laboriously as a private tutor. And since Goethe, perhaps more than any other poet, could write only of that which he had personally experienced, since the whole of his work was merely "fragments of a great confession," as he himself said in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, he showed himself all his life scarcely touched by social questions.

His fate led him to the Court of Karl August, who was one of the most pleasing personalities among the princes of his time, and in whose service Goethe actively and responsibly took part in political life. His rôle in the political development of the little state of Saxe-Weimar was important. He improved the roads, reorganised the finances and was concerned with almost all branches of the administration. The dukedom became thus the paragon of a principality governed by enlightened absolutism.² Even in advanced old age Goethe proudly described himself as the servant of Karl August, and said of him: "When I think of this rule of his, what else was it but continual service? What was it but service for the attainment of great ends, service for the good of his people!"³ Goethe saw in Karl August just such another representative of enlightened absolutism as he had reverenced in Frederick the Great in his youth. All his life he was a royalist and he had little understanding for the republican and revolutionary ideas of the young Schiller.⁴ He had a profound respect for traditional and

¹ Cf. H. Voelker, *Die Stadt Goethes, Frankfort a. Main im 18. Jahrh.*, Frankfurt, 1932, *passim*; and Bruford, *Germany in the 18th Century*, p. 184 ff.

² Cf. F. Hartung, *Das Grossherzogtum Sachsen unter der Regierung Karl Augusts*, Weimar 1923, *passim*.

³ Goethe zu Eckermann, 27 April, 1825, Insel edition, p. 187.

⁴ To Eckermann, 25 Februar, 1824, op. cit., p. 102.

established power and was convinced that only monarchy provided for an orderly social life.¹ The basic feature of his political thought was a remarkable lack of interest in theoretical political questions.² His enormous correspondence, for instance, in which an amazing quantity of problems are discussed, contains scarcely any political statements. We have positive evidence that his political detachment was not a result of his old age. When in 1793 a harmless debating society in Trèves was dissolved by order of the Government, one of its members applied to Goethe for assistance. The answer which he received is highly characteristic: "We need," Goethe wrote, "more than ever that moderation and calmness of spirit which only the Muses can give us."³ It is needless to say that Goethe refused to intervene.

The fact that he so perseveringly tried to bring the French Revolution into artistic form is no proof to the contrary. The Revolution was such an immense event that no one could evade it. Rather, it is characteristic that most of the works in which Goethe dealt with the French Revolution remained fragments and that none of them was successful, with the exception of *Hermann und Dorothea*, where the Revolution only supplied the background.⁴ They were "products of an arid time," as Bielschowsky-Linden called them in their biography of Goethe.⁵ If we examine German literature from 1789 to 1830 to see how far the French Revolution was treated in a manner suitable to the subject, the result is extremely meagre.⁶ This is

¹ Cf. *Natürliche Tochter*, Act 1, Scene 5. "It is the highest duty of every right-thinking man to retain the people's hearts for the ruler; for if he shakes, the commonwealth shakes, and if he falls, everything collapses with him." *Works*, vol. xii, p. 241.

² Of the 2,276 books which he borrowed from the Weimar library in the years 1778-1832, only twenty-nine had a political content, and those chiefly about the French Revolution. Of the 177 books which he borrowed from the library in Jena in the years 1810-1832, only one was of political interest.

³ Hansen, loc. cit., ii, p. 912.

⁴ Cf. Gooch, loc. cit., p. 174 ff., and Loiseau, *Goethe et la France*, p. 245 ff.

⁵ P. 41. Bauer called Goethe's works on the Revolution products of "annoyance," loc. cit., p. 23.

⁶ Hans Hirschstein, *Die französische Revolution im deutschen Drama und Epos nach 1815*, p. 26.

merely a further proof of the fact that the German middle class was not, even mentally, ripe for revolution.

The attempt has repeatedly been made to consider Goethe as an original political thinker,¹ but this undertaking is useless. Goethe never developed a political system, or even expressed himself coherently on political questions. Even though he took an intense interest in the French Revolution, towards the wars of liberation he was extremely cool and uninterested, so that he was decried as an egoist. Goethe tried to justify himself against these attacks. When Eckermann, his faithful Boswell, asked him what he had to say to these reproaches, he replied: "How could I take up arms without hating, and how could I hate without youth?"² It speaks well for Goethe's honesty that he so frankly acknowledged his inability to take part in things with which his feelings were not in sympathy, but it shows also that political questions did not touch the emotional side of him. We learn from many witnesses how Goethe watched the wars of liberation as a disinterested observer and showed no understanding for the deep popular movement which accompanied them. He forbade his son to join the army. He stated to Luden in 1806 or 1807 that he was glad not to have suffered any injury, though he emphasised the fact that Germany's fate distressed him. "At least I have come through the evil days without much harm. It was not necessary that I should take up public affairs when they were sufficiently cared for by excellent men; and so I could stay in my closet and think of my inmost self."³

For Napoleon he cherished all his life a deep admiration, and he wore with pride the order which the Emperor had bestowed on him (he always had a great love for titles and distinctions). For the liberal movement after the wars of liberation he showed not the slightest understanding and he fully approved of Metternich's reaction. Of the Holy Alliance he said that

¹ Cf. Lorenz, *Goethe's politische Lehrjahre*, Berlin, 1893, *passim*.

² *Goethe zu Eckermann*, 14 März, 1830, loc. cit., p. 531.

³ *Stunden mit Goethe*, p. 331.

there had never been anything that was greater or would do more good for men.¹ He believed in censorship and spoke of the "mischief of the freedom of the Press."² He himself as an official had done everything to limit the liberal Press of Weimar, which adopted a very radical tone after the war. An interview which he had with Luden, a liberal professor at Jena, is very characteristic of his attitude. Luden wanted to have Goethe's collaboration in his political periodical and obtained an unqualified refusal. "What have the Germans had from their charming freedom of the Press," Goethe cried out contemptuously, "but that each could say of the others as many disagreeable and mean things as he pleased?" He gave Luden this characteristic advice: "let the world go its way, and do not mix yourself up in the quarrels of kings."³ Luden called Goethe's attitude sorrowful resignation, but others called it selfishness and cowardice, and certainly Goethe's political attitude was one of the reasons why he soon ceased to be the poet of youth, whereas Schiller's youthful revolutionary appeal had lost none of its attractions.⁴

In order to understand Goethe's attitude to the war of liberation, we must consider that he belonged to a generation to which the national question meant nothing. Wieland said that he could not remember ever having heard the word German in his youth, Lessing ridiculed patriotism and even Fichte in his later period described himself as a citizen of the world.⁵ Even in 1830 Goethe bitterly said: "We have not a city, we have not even a territory of which we can say: Here is Germany." Goethe agreed with Fichte, Schiller and Humboldt in thinking that for the Germans cosmopolitanism and patriot-

¹ To *Eckermann*, 3 Januar, 1827, loc. cit., p. 239. At the same time he had a great admiration for Canning, the bitterest opponent of the Holy Alliance.

² To *Eckermann*, 22 März, 1831, loc. cit., p. 621. For Goethe's attitude to the censorship, cf. Hartung, loc. cit., p. 199 ff.

³ *Goethe's Gespräche*, vol. iii., p. 100.

⁴ See Mundt, Th., *Allgemeine Literaturgeschichte*, vol. iii., p. 174 ff.

⁵ Cf. Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, *passim*.

ism coincided to an unusual extent. Thus he wrote in one of the *Xenien*:

*Zur Nation euch zu bilden, ihr hofft es, Deutsche, vergebens, Bildet, ihr könnt es, dafür freier zum Menschen euch aus.*¹

In March 1832, a few days before his death, he said to Eckermann: "And what does it mean, then, to have a patriotic effect? When a poet has been working all his life to fight against harmful prejudices, to set aside narrow views, to enlighten the minds of his people, to purify their taste, and to ennable their way of judging and thinking, what better can he do?"² This is the same opinion as Wieland expressed fifty years earlier: "Patriotism, to me, is every warm enthusiasm with which anything is furthered or prevented, when one has the conviction that it is, respectively, for the general good or harm of mankind."^{3, 4}

When men like Humboldt co-operated in the national reconstruction of Germany, they did so almost against their will, under the compulsion of circumstances, not because they had at heart an image of the greater Germany. German neo-humanism was of a cosmopolitan hue, essentially concerned with the development of the individual as a human being. Thus we see, too, that Goethe, in his works on the Revolution, dealt with the fate of individuals and not with social questions. He was interested in the reaction of social events on the individual, not in those events themselves. And yet Goethe felt a deep love for Germany. Luden wrote, after the conversation mentioned above: "In this hour I have been convinced in my inmost mind that a very bad mistake is made by those who

¹ "To form yourselves into a nation, Germans, you hope in vain, form yourselves, therefore, as you can, more freely as human beings."

² *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, p. 647.

³ *Deutsche Merkur*, July 1779, p. 55.

⁴ A letter which Archenholz sent to the French National Assembly and in which he protested that it was no shame to belong to the German nation which had contributed so much to the furtherance of education is characteristic of the prevailing sense of national inferiority. *Minerva*, 1792, vol. xi, p. 435 ff.

accuse Goethe of having had no patriotism, no German sentiment, no belief in our people, no feeling for Germany's honour or shame, fortune or misfortune."

A national movement of wide scope could develop in Germany only when the middle class had overcome its mistrust of the State, and also learned to identify its interests with those of the State. One of the most important things required before a national consciousness could arise was that the old frontiers between the various German states should be destroyed and economic unity brought about in Germany. On this point Goethe's insight was far ahead of his contemporaries. "I am not afraid," he said to Eckermann on October 23, 1828, "that Germany will fail to be united, our good roads and future railways will do their part. Let it be united, so that the German Thaler and Groschen may have the same value all over the Empire; united so that my luggage can pass unopened through all the thirty-six states." Goethe realised also, in contrast to many of his contemporaries, that Napoleon's effect on Germany had been a blessing, in that he had finally destroyed much that was rotten; although he had admired him in the first place from the standpoint of the artist as "the compendium of mankind," the daemonic man. He understood by daemonic "that which cannot be explained by understanding and reason,"¹ and he saw in Napoleon one of those mysterious personalities in face of whom all ordinary measures fail.

Goethe was not only an individualist for whom "the highest fulfilment of man was to shape his own life from his inner laws,"² he had also a profound respect for that which had already come into being. In the ancient imperial city of Frankfurt he had been conscious still of some of the glory of the Holy Roman Empire, and even although he ridiculed it later, yet, after the Empire had collapsed, he based his hope for national rebirth in Germany on the restoration of the old Empire. When he had outlived his period of "Storm and

¹ To Eckermann, 2 März, 1831, loc. cit., p. 601.

² Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. ii, p. 224.

Stress," his fundamental conservative traits of character were strengthened. Anything violent or sudden was hateful to him, because he felt it to be unnatural. We find this notion again even in his geological convictions. He was convinced that the mountains were not created by revolutions which interrupted the regular geological development, but were the work of slow, continuous forces. "I hate any violent upheaval," he said to Eckermann in 1825, "because as much good is annihilated as gained by it. I hate those who bring it about, as well as those who give them cause to do so."¹ Goethe held fast to what was established, because he could not convince himself that a change, especially one that was too sudden, would improve matters. He wrote this himself in the "annals": "An active, productive spirit, a really patriotically disposed man, will be approved if he dreads the overthrowing of all that exists, when he has not the least idea what better, or even what else, may result."² Therefore he hated the French Revolution, realising very well that it contributed to the collapse of a whole world-order. The strong support which he still gave to the Enlightenment led him to believe in a gradual development of the human mind and to look upon any abrupt interruption of this development as against nature. Goethe realised very well that revolutions are usually caused by the oppression of the masses, even if he occasionally went so far as to state that in France anything could be done by bribes, and that the entire French Revolution had been carried through by this means.³ But his real view on this subject he summarised in 1824 as follows: "I was also entirely convinced that any great revolution is never the fault of the people but of the Government. Revolutions are quite impossible, provided the Governments are always just and always wakeful enough to anticipate them by timely improvements, instead of continuing to resist until what is necessary is forced upon them from below."⁴ It was

¹ Loc. cit., p. 186.

² Works, vol. xxx, p. 17.

³ To Eckermann 22 März, 1824, loc. cit., p. 100.

⁴ To Eckermann, 4 Januar, 1824, p. 92.

the same idea that he put into the mouth of the Countess in his play on the Revolution, *Die Aufgeregten*. The Countess had been to Paris and had decided to treat her peasants with justice, because that was the best way to prevent a revolution at home. Goethe believed, as he made the nobleman say in the *Bürgergeneral*, that "in a country where the prince is accessible to every one, where all classes think fairly of one another, where no one is prevented from being active in his own way, where useful information and knowledge are extended to all, no parties arise."¹ That was the programme of enlightened absolutism.

The problem of political freedom played no part in the thought of Goethe. "Man is not born to be free," his hero Tassa exclaims.² What he thought necessary in the way of freedom, it seemed to him could be taken for granted. "If any one has as much freedom as he needs to live healthily and carry on his trade, he has enough, and every one has easily as much as that. The citizen is as free as the aristocrat, provided he keeps within the bounds which God has set for him, through the state of life into which he is born."³ He defined freedom, in agreement with the thinkers on Natural Law, as the possibility of doing, under all conditions, that which is reasonable.⁴

The hero of his drama *Egmont* struggles, not like Schiller's heroes for an abstract idea of liberty, but for the traditional rights of the people of the Netherlands. Egmont is a prince after Goethe's own heart, frank, friendly and filled with a profound belief in his people, while Alba is the representative of a sinister, unenlightened absolutism, which Goethe, like

¹ *Works*, vol. ix, p. 144. This utterance shows how strongly Goethe's political views were influenced by the fact that he had spent his life in a small state. Like most of his contemporaries he could only think in terms of the German "Particularism."

² Glaubt nicht, dass mir
Der Freiheit wilder Trieb den Busen blähe,
Der Mensch ist nicht geboren frei zu sein.
Und für den Edlen ist kein schöner Glück
Als einem Fürsten, den er ehrt, zu dienen.

³ To *Eckermann*, 18 Januar, 1827, loc. cit., p. 258.

⁴ *Gespräche*, vol. vi, p. 146.

most of his contemporaries, hated. Alba does not believe in men; he has a profound contempt for the people. "Believe me," he says to Egmont, "a people never grows up, never grows sensible; a people always remains childish. Therefore it is far better to hem them in, so that they may be kept like children and guided like children for their own good." Egmont's proof, on the other hand, rests on the consideration that men let themselves be governed only by laws which are in accord with their own particular nature. With this view Goethe made a bridge from Möser's idea to that of the historical school of law.

Goethe did not by any means share the traditional preference for England, particularly for the English Constitution. He had the greatest respect for the practical gifts of the English, but nevertheless he saw in the English Parliament opposing forces which paralysed each other and "where even the great insight of a single man has difficulty in penetrating."¹ His attitude to the question of the Constitution, as to all other political questions, was determined by his belief that princes were appointed by God.² His belief in the divine nature of princely power went sometimes as far as Machiavellianism. Thus he defended Frederick the Great's policy with regard to Poland and declared that no king could keep his word, if circumstances compelled him to break it.³

He was most profoundly convinced that politics were a difficult art, which it was best to leave to those who had studied them. We saw that he took it ill when the learned Luden wished to concern himself with political questions, and he said to Eckermann angrily in March 1832: "I hate all bungling like sin, especially bungling in affairs of State, from which nothing but misery results for thousands and millions."⁴ And in another famous passage he defined the principle of the division of labour in relation to politics with complete clearness. "It is

¹ To Eckermann, 9 Juli, 1827, loc. cit., p. 334.

² *Gespräche*, vol. vi, p. 319.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. viii, p. 128.

⁴ Eckermann, loc. cit., p. 647.

always most reasonable that every one should carry on his *métier*, and that he should not hinder others from doing their part. Let the shoemaker remain at his craft and the farmer behind the plough and let the prince know how to govern."¹ Goethe did not like the people to be too much interested in political questions. Thus he makes the nobleman say to the peasant in the *Bürgergeneral*: "Let foreign countries manage their own affairs and look at the political sky, at most, only on Sundays and holidays."²

Goethe called himself a moderate liberal.³ This is just as correct as the description which Eckermann gave of him as a mild aristocrat.⁴ Goethe was certainly not a liberal in the modern sense of the word, according to which the struggle for a Constitution and for the rights of personal freedom are bound up with the concept of liberalism. Goethe himself defined what he understood by liberalism: "The true liberal," he said to Eckermann on February 14, 1830, "tries, with the means at his command, to do as much good as ever he can, but is cautious of wishing to destroy immediately by fire and sword faults which are often inevitable. He endeavours by intelligent progress gradually to suppress public wrongs, without simultaneously spoiling just as much that is good by taking violent measures. He contents himself, in this always imperfect world, with what is good, until time and circumstances favour the attainment of something better."⁵ This was a programme of reform to which both liberals and conservatives could equally subscribe, but fundamentally Goethe avoided the basic question as to the limits of the power of the State.

Goethe was conservative in the sense in which such a man as Burke was conservative. His most profound wisdom was contained in the recognition that the general good would be best served if every one did his duty in his own position and calling. That is the political ideal of the middle-class man, and

¹ To Eckermann, 25 Februar, 1824, loc. cit., p. 102.

² *Works*, vol. ix, p. 143.

³ To Eckermann, 14 Februar, 1836, loc. cit., p. 673.

⁴ To Eckermann, 9 Juli, 1827, loc. cit., p. 334. ⁵ Loc. cit., p. 873.

Goethe personified it best in the figure of Hermann.¹ But he was never reactionary, even though he may have helped by his silence the reactionary forces in Germany after the wars of liberation. "In the principle of maintaining what exists and of obviating revolutions," he wrote, "I entirely agree with them (the monarchists), but not as to the means of doing so. For they call stupidity and darkness to their aid, I call understanding and light to mine."²

In one of his works, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, a product of his old age, Goethe developed political ideas which appear to be in opposition to the rest of his political views. In this novel we meet a group of men who have decided to emigrate to America, in order to build up a new kind of state. They have taken on a number of craftsmen and are convinced that they will succeed in founding a completely new kind of community, of which the first principle is work. Goethe's views on the form of organisation of this community are vague, but nevertheless we learn that he holds in readiness for it a system which may be described as economic democracy. In this utopian community there are no class distinctions, but only division of labour. The social ideal behind this image of society is that of the social man, who only by working for the community becomes a personality and by being able to live through the community becomes aware of his social duties. Here possession is no longer a privilege, but a social obligation. The owner has by reason of his possessions not only special rights, but, above all, special duties to the community. Already in the first part of *Wilhelm Meister* Goethe had shown to how great an extent the individual is dependent on society. "Only in the community," he wrote, "do we become capable of living, and he who does not attain to a relationship with the community is not only outwardly but also inwardly lost."³ Goethe did not

¹ "For the man who, in a time of fluctuations, is fluctuating in mind, increases the evil and spreads it further and further, but he who remains firm in his mind shapes the world for himself."

² Bielschowski, loc. cit., ii, p. 439.

³ Quoted by Korff, *Geist der Goethezeit*, vol. ii, p. 354.

work out a constitution for his Utopia, but merely suggested a few principles. All citizens in the new colony have equal rights. They institute authority either by direct suffrage or through representatives. The ethical basis of the community is the Christian religion, and indeed a specifically Protestant variety, of which the chief dogma is reverence for those above us, beside us, and below us. Goethe was so much convinced of the good will of these colonists that he considered a judicial system as not necessary at first. Public-houses and circulating libraries, which Goethe thought particularly dangerous, were to be prohibited in the new state.

Although these ideas do not seem to be in accord with the rest of Goethe's convictions, yet they represent an organic development of his fundamental idea of the nature of man. Even this ideal of a colonial state betrays its origin in the ideas of the Enlightenment. The emigration is organised and led by a number of people whose thought is schooled in the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment. One of them formulates expressly their aim thus: "Our society is based on the belief that every one should be enlightened in his own measure and according to his aims."¹ This novel teaches us why Goethe opposed democracy and why, when he took up an attitude to questions of practical politics, he adhered so strictly to the system of enlightened absolutism. He did not believe that a democracy was possible in a country which had experienced centuries of absolute government. Therefore, in the novel in which he developed his ideal of the State, he made the citizens who were to institute a democracy emigrate to America, a new country with a future. There no ancient traditions stood in the way of a new development, there a democracy could develop organically if the citizens were educated in its spirit.

Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre is also interesting for another reason. In it Goethe took up a position with regard to economic development, above all, to the problems of the industrial revolution. When he was bringing the book into its present

¹ Book III, ch. 9.

form, that is, in the time between 1821 and 1827, the Industrial Revolution was in progress even in Germany. Goethe saw that the machine age would arise and he was well aware of its dangers. He feared what has in fact come to pass, that the machine would completely mechanise labour and would thus infinitely sharpen class distinctions. Therefore he developed, as it were, once again the philosophy of personal work, whereby workmen would not be soulless slaves of the machine, mere objects of exploitation, but trained craftsmen who bore the honourable title of artists and were full members of the State.¹ Goethe, however, has no solution for the problems with which the Industrial Revolution confronts mankind. His weavers simply emigrate into a country in which no machines exist.

Goethe's contribution to the history of political thought was slight. We find in him no original ideas and scarcely any connection with the progressive forces of the time. And yet he cannot be left out of a history of the political thought of this period. He was an attentive and intelligent witness of the times. In his earliest youth came the Seven Years War, from which Prussia arose as a great European Power; as a mature man he experienced the French Revolution and observed the rise and fall of Napoleon, the collapse of the Empire, and the wars of liberation and shortly before his death he had for the second time the opportunity of experiencing a revolutionary movement on the other side of the Rhine. It is hard to say how far Goethe's political attitude, his reserve, his conservatism and scepticism were characteristic of the educated men among his contemporaries. Of one thing there is no doubt, we meet this attitude of sceptical indifference to political questions, of resigned abandon to the ruling powers, throughout the future course of German history. Many intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Germany withdrew, like Goethe, from politics and left the government to the professionals and bureaucrats, in order to live for the development of

¹ Goethe developed similar ideas in the last scenes of the second part of *Faust*.

their own personality, for their arts and science. Perhaps this is one of the deepest reasons why German democracy was incapable of living and failed so shamefully.

It is, of course, a superficial explanation to put Goethe's political indifference down entirely to the fact that he was a satisfied bourgeois and was therefore interested in upholding, as far as possible, the existing régime. Yet, strangely enough, Goethe himself seemed to support this explanation. On July 15, 1827, he said to Eckermann: "In our youth, when we possess nothing, or, at all events, do not know how to value peaceful possession, we are democrats; but if in the course of a long life we have come into property, then we not only wish it to be secure, but we wish also that our children and grandchildren may peacefully enjoy what we have gained. Therefore in old age we are always aristocrats."¹ This avowal would delight any Marxian, but it is not, of course, the whole truth. Obviously, Goethe was like most of his wealthy fellows, more inclined to accept the existing conditions than he would have been if he had had to struggle all his life with material cares. We find, nevertheless, the same flight from politics not only in the aristocrat Humboldt and the bourgeois Goethe, but also in the petty bourgeois Schiller, even if the latter never shared Goethe's unbounded reverence for the ruling class.

Goethe, Humboldt and Schiller were non-political humanists because, in Germany, the spiritual emancipation of the middle classes preceded the political, and it is one of the tragedies of German history that the political emancipation of the middle classes was never entirely to succeed. Goethe realised that he could not fulfil his specific task of renewing the idea of humanity if he placed himself in opposition to the ruling powers. He was very precisely aware of this when he wrote: "I have never in my life liked to place myself in hostile, useless opposition to the overpowering stream of the crowd or of the ruling principle; I have preferred to retire into my own shell and there house myself as I pleased."² He felt that politics was something

¹ Eckermann, loc. cit., p. 336.

² *Gespräche*, vol. iv, p. 209.

limiting, which would lead him astray from his own task. He therefore despised political poems, and we cannot but admit that he was justified, if we think of most of the products of the political muse. "As soon as a poet means to have a political effect," he said to Eckermann in March 1832, "he must give himself up to a party, and as soon as he does that he is lost as a poet; he must bid farewell to his free spirit, his wide, unprejudiced view and draw over his ears instead the cap of limitation and blind hatred. The poet will love his native land as a man and a citizen, but the native land of his poetical powers and his poetical effect is the good, the noble and the beautiful, which is not bound to any particular province or any particular country, and which he seizes and shapes wherever he finds it."¹

In Schiller's political thought, two periods can be clearly distinguished. The first was the period of his youth, in which he was one of the heralds of the "Storm and Stress" movement, the second was his classical period, in which, under the influence of Kant and Goethe, he came to an aesthetical-humanistic idea of life, which was to lead him away from directly political problems.

The Storm and Stress movement was a movement of youth, and consequently was radical and noisy. It was clear that a reaction had to set in against the rationalism of the eighteenth century, and this reaction was all the stronger because the younger generation was most profoundly discontented with the ruling political régime. Yet even the Storm and Stress movement was not a political movement; it lacked clearly formulated political aims, such as those, for instance, which had been defined by the great political thinkers of France in the eighteenth century. On the political side, these men of letters, poets and dramatists went no further than a rather vague humanism. They contented themselves with a continually repeated protest against the rule of reason and dreamed of men who, trusting entirely to their emotions, would break down all social barriers. A good example of this attitude was given by Heinse in his

¹ Eckermann, loc. cit., p. 646.

novel *Ardinghella*, published in 1789, in which some of these visionaries founded a state where there was community of property and where every one took part in the government. In this "humanistic democracy" all the citizens were perfect human beings. One of the favourite heroes of the Storm and Stress poets was the noble criminal who struggled against the law as the incarnation of a narrow-minded rationalism. They saw the characteristic of a great man in one who set himself above the law and lived his own life. "Why should we allow ourselves to be held in check by customs and laws which are only for the crowd, simply because they are the crowd and cannot govern themselves?" wrote Heinse in *Ardinghella*. One of their spiritual fathers was Rousseau, but a completely misunderstood Rousseau. It seems as though they had read only the essay on the origin of inequality; at all events, they knew nothing of the author of the *Contrat Social*, who defined freedom as the rule of law. This glorification of the criminal was the first sign of that struggle for liberty which was to determine political thought in the nineteenth century.

Schiller's first play was a robber play. In it the young poet protested in the name of his generation against the narrow world of rationalism, against "this ink-blotting age," in which free, great-minded men must become robbers, if they wished to live in freedom. For Schiller also freedom was the magic word. "The law has never yet formed a great man, but freedom breeds Colossuses and giants," declaims the robber chief. He would, however, have been extremely embarrassed if he had been asked what he understood by this term. The whole drama is certainly rich in declamations and in real pathos, but very poor in political ideas. It is a typical Storm and Stress product in that it denies the order of society as a whole, in contrast to the Enlightenment which always wanted to reform gradually. The robber Karl Moor despairs of mankind, therefore he becomes a criminal; he wishes not to reform but to destroy. His attitude is politically as sterile as the attitude of any anarchist and Schiller is unable to carry it through to the end. Moor

realises at the end of the play how fruitless his struggle was and he gives himself up to the police. This shows that Schiller did fight shy of the final consequences of his radicalism.

Die Räuber had an enormous success. It gave fitting expression to the universal discontent and to the general yearning for a better world. The Enlightenment had also propagated the idea of freedom and protested against the dependence of the individual on the Church, the absolute monarchy and the feudal system. By freedom was understood the rule of reason. "Subordination," as Korff wrote, "to the law acknowledged and chosen by ourselves is, for the enlightened man, accompanied by the feeling of the highest human freedom, indeed it is itself freedom."¹ The young people of the Storm and Stress movement went further than that. They refused even the rule of reason and appealed to the right of the individual of genius to shape his life in complete freedom. In contrast to the rigid rationalism which had ruled the whole of the eighteenth century, the pendulum swung far over to the other side. The Storm and Stress movement was the first great counter-movement, the Romantic movement was to be the second.

Schiller called his second play, *Die Verschwörung des Fiesko*, a republican tragedy. He had been inspired by Rousseau to the treatment of this material and he intended to portray the struggle of a people against a tyrant. Schiller's republicanism is not, however, to be understood in the modern sense. He merely shared the universal literary enthusiasm for the ancient Roman republicans like Cato and Brutus, and his *Fiesko* was only a modern edition of the tragedy of Caesar. The struggle in the drama is carried on against tyranny and not for democracy, and at the end of the play, after the collapse of the conspiracy, the rule of the old Doge, an enlightened despot, is the only guarantee against anarchy. The play suffers, on the artistic side, from the contradiction that this "republican" tragedy shows in reality the failure of a republican movement. Fiesko dies because he himself strives for power and because "where

¹ Loc. cit., i, p. 200.

a Brutus lives, a Caesar must die"; but this Brutus is not a popular hero, but a sinister and stiff-necked representative of tradition.

Even in *Fiesko* Schiller did not go beyond the principles of enlightened absolutism. What interested Schiller, in the play, was not its political problems but the personal fate of its hero, and we have the impression that the whole republican atmosphere is merely scenery. *Die Räuber* was more convincing, because it was logical in its denial of the established order and because its accusation against the order of society was understood by many who did not trouble to inquire what was to take its place. Hence the success of *Fiesko* was only very slight.

Schiller's third youthful drama is, even more than the other two, a drama of the fate of individuals. In *Kabale und Liebe*, Schiller placed his heroes in an environment which mirrored with startling clearness the social and political evils of the time and gave vent to his hatred of the tyrant who was his prince. All the political evils which we mentioned in the first chapter, petticoat government, nepotism, and the selling of soldiers, are here placed in the pillory. In this lies the political importance of the play and not in the political ideas which are developed in it. Like *Die Räuber*, it was a protest which gave expression to the feelings of wide circles. In spite of this, its importance in the development of political thought was but slight. In a sense it broke down open doors, since these evils were disapproved of by all decent people and were of some importance only in the smaller states. The struggle of the middle class in France from 1789 onwards and in Germany after the wars of liberation, was not against the abuses of enlightened absolutism, but against the absolutist system itself. It is very characteristic both of the social position of the middle class and of Schiller's estimate of that position, that the middle-class characters of the play show very little "class consciousness" and by their servility appear exceedingly repulsive.

Schiller's next work, *Don Carlos*, was a link with the period in which he concerned himself thoroughly with history. This

drama was also a typical product of the Storm and Stress movement. Its real hero is the Marquis Posa, who is an infinitely refined Karl Moor. The political object of his life is to achieve the liberation of the Netherlands from the Spanish yoke and to turn Spain itself into an enlightened monarchy. Posa is a typical idealist, not to say visionary, who dreams of a pure and happy human race in which the principle of humanity alone will rule. Whereas in the *Räuber* Schiller had rejected the existing social order, in *Don Carlos* he endeavoured to draw a picture of a better society. But here also Schiller could not imagine a different form of government from that of enlightened absolutism. The Marquis Posa is not the defendant of a democratic rising of the people against the system of absolutism, but the passionate and loquacious representative of an abstract liberty of conscience and of thought, which he demands that the king shall grant. It is noteworthy that Schiller, as soon as he had outlived the radicalism of the Storm and Stress, reverted completely to the lines of thought of the Enlightenment. Posa's tirades are altogether in the style of the Enlightenment, and behind the play is the belief in reason, which goes so far that Posa attempts to win over the king to his humanitarian aims by persuasion. He is a Protestant in the sense that he protests against the sinister rule of superstition and prejudices, and Schiller makes the king say to him, "You are a Protestant," whereupon Posa replies, "My religion is also yours." Completely in accordance with the opinion of the Enlightenment, Schiller meant by this that dogma did not matter and that the religious feeling of the free human being was alone decisive.

Like the whole of his generation, Schiller had no positive relation to the State. Posa fights, therefore, not for a particular state, but for mankind, if one is to describe his declamations as fighting at all. It is therefore not surprising to find that Schiller agreed with his friend Humboldt, when the latter wanted the State to play as small a part as possible in social life.

Don Carlos had been written shortly before the outbreak of

the French Revolution. Schiller at first welcomed the Revolution, full of hope because he believed it would help to bring about a new, humane order of society. He was soon disappointed by it, though even as late as 1792 he intended to migrate to France. He buried himself completely in historical and philosophical studies, and after the execution of the king, which shocked him extremely, he took no further interest in political affairs.¹ Meanwhile, his own economic position had improved considerably. He had become a recognised writer and had been appointed a professor at the University of Jena. Under the influence of Kant and Goethe, he arrived at the conviction that all attempts to change social relations were vain, until new men had been educated. Like Humboldt and so many others, he turned to the study of the Greeks. He developed what may be called an aesthetic individualism. On November 27, 1788, he wrote to a woman friend: "The greatest State is a work of man, man is a work of great inimitable nature. The State is a creation of chance, but man is a necessary being and by what else is a state great and honourable but by the powers of its individuals? The State is only an effect of human power, only a work of thought, but man is the very source of the power and the creator of the thought." These characteristic words were written before the outbreak of the French Revolution, so that it is not to the point to attribute Schiller's "flight from politics" to his disappointment about the Revolution, even if this disappointment strengthened his mistrust of the State. In reality this attitude is only an expression of the fact that until then the awakening middle classes had felt at home only in the field of culture and feared that the State would disturb this cultural development. "Were the fact true," wrote Schiller to the Duke of Augustenburg, "that the extraordinary case had really come to pass that political legislation were

¹ "It is literally true," thus he wrote to Reinhardt on August 3, 1795, "that I do not live in my century, and although I am told that a revolution has happened in France, this is about all I know of it." This is, of course, an exaggeration, but he was so disappointed in the political development that he ceased to read newspapers.

transferred to reason, that man were respected and treated as an end in himself, the law raised to the throne and true freedom made the basis of the construction of the State, then I would for ever take leave of the muses and devote all my activity to the most glorious of all works of art, the monarchy of reason. But it is just this fact that I venture to doubt."¹ Like Humboldt, Schiller feared that one-sidedness and monotony would result from too much interference of the State in private life, whereas according to his idea the essence of civilisation is completeness. "A constitution of the State," he wrote in the letters on the aesthetic education of man, "which is in a position to effect unity only by removing variety, will be imperfect. The State should honour not only the objective and generic but also the subjective and specific character of the individual."² Thus he demanded that one should begin by creating citizens for the Constitution before one creates a Constitution for citizens.

Schiller endeavoured to find the element which makes man a social being, a true citizen, and upon which the order of society can be built up. He thought he had found this social element in the idea of beauty. He demanded from social life in the first place harmony and variety brought into unity. Beauty is harmony and wholeness, in it is freedom and equality, and thus Schiller set up the ideal of the aesthetic state in which all citizens have realised in themselves the ideal human being. Man is born into the State; but this state, which he finds, as it were, in existence, is merely a "natural state," an "emergency state." The task of man is to change this natural state into a rational state, in which man arrives at the most complete fulfilment of his personality. The difficulty, however, is that, in order to be able to realise the rational state, man must be already a moral being, and he cannot be that in the natural state, where physical force reigns. Schiller escapes from this vicious circle by endowing man with the ideal of beauty, which

¹ Quoted by Schnabel, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 286.

² *Works*, vol. xii, p. 10.

he can realise everywhere and which forms the stepping-stone to morality. This "aesthetic state" is an aesthetic and not a political speculation and can therefore be very briefly disposed of here, the more so since it has a very marked similarity to Humboldt's ideal of a state.

Schiller had become very doubtful of the possibilities of a civilisation built up on intellect. "The enlightenment of the intellect," he wrote, "of which the cultivated classes boast, not quite without reason, seems on the whole to have so little ennobling influence on their dispositions, that, rather, it furnishes the maxims by which wickedness is justified."¹

Schiller expressed his political views most clearly in a little essay in which he described the legislation of Lycurgus and Solon.² It seems appropriate to quote the relevant passage here in full: "The legislation of Lycurgus is a masterpiece of knowledge of the State and of men when considered in connection with the ends the legislator had in view. He wanted a powerful, solidly founded, indestructible State; political strength and durability were the objects for which he strove, and he attained these objects so far as was possible in the circumstances. But if one compares the end which he had before him with the end of mankind, then a profound disapproval must take the place of the admiration which the first fleeting glance gained from us. Everything may be sacrificed to the good of the State but that for which the State itself serves only as a means. The State itself is never an end, it is important only as a condition under which the end of mankind may be fulfilled, and this end of mankind is nothing but the training of all the powers of man; in short, progress. If the constitution of a State prevents all the powers that are in man from developing, if it prevents the progress of the mind, then it is worthless and harmful, however well thought out and perfect of its kind it may be."³

¹ *Works*, vol. xii, p. 13.

² *Ibid.*, vol. x, p. 377 ff. It can be disregarded here whether this essay was really an original work of Schiller's or whether he based it on a work of his teacher Nast, since he at all events identified himself with the views expressed in it.

³ *Ibid.*, x, p. 388.

Here Schiller showed clearly his mistrust of the State. For him the only criterion of political institutions was whether they are capable "of bringing out all the powers that are in man, whether they further, or at least do not hinder, the progress of civilisation." As a disciple of Kant, he opposed any political philosophy which idolised the State and abased the individual to a mere means.

The first writing of Kant's that Schiller had read was his essay on history, by which Schiller had been decisively influenced. Kant had set out from the point that history could be looked upon as the fulfilment of a secret plan of nature to set up a perfect state. He had called upon the historians to write history from this point of view. This was the point of view of the Enlightenment, for which history provided the proof of the gradual development of reason to perfection. Schiller thought he was the historian whose vocation it was to write history on the foundation of Kant's principles. He laid down his opinions on history in his inaugural lecture given at Jena in 1789. What is notable in this lecture is the optimism and the *naïveté* with which he attempted to prove that historical development must necessarily lead to an idealised present. Thus he said: "How many wars had to be waged, how many treaties contracted, broken and contracted again, in order to force Europe to the principle of peace, which alone allows the states and the citizens to turn their attention to themselves and to collect their forces for a sensible purpose."¹

In the nineteenth century Schiller was very often claimed by the representatives of liberalism. The reason for this is that his glorification of the individual accorded with the demands of the liberals, even if his motives were quite different, and that he, like the liberals, ascribed a subordinate rôle to the State. In still greater measure, he has been celebrated as a poet of national freedom, although he was not a nationalist. Like most

¹ *Works*, x, p. 322. Schiller realised himself that he was a poet even when he wrote history: "History is a magazine for my imagination, and the objects must suffer to be that which they become under my hands," he wrote to Körner on July 27, 1788.

of his contemporaries, he was of a cosmopolitan disposition, and he saw in the German people not a national but a cultural unit. The task of the Germans was for him the training of their humanity and personality. "He was held back from politics," Meinecke says, "by the high ambition that the Germans were now called upon to form the real human people, the truest mirror of mankind, as once the Greeks had formed it."¹ In spite of some patriotic passages in *Wilhelm Tell*, the concept of a national German State meant nothing to him. He was too much the son of the eighteenth century to see in a nation anything else but a particular aspect of humanity. All attempts to turn Schiller into a forerunner of modern nationalism seem futile if we compare them with the words which he wrote to Körner: "The patriotic interest is important only for immature nations. . . . It is a poor and mean ideal to write for *one* nation; to a philosophic mind this limitation must seem unbearable."²

In his *Wilhelm Tell*, the last play that he was able to finish, he gave a masterly picture of the struggle of a people for its freedom. Once more he protested against absolutism, this time not in the name of humanity, but, like Goethe in *Egmont*, in the name of the ancient historical right of a free people. He defends here not liberty in an abstract sense but the liberties of the Swiss people. It is characteristic that in this struggle nobles and commons fight side by side, and that Tell, who has killed the representative of tyranny, turns away Johannes Parricida with horror, because he had committed a political murder through ambition. Thus Schiller here acknowledged, in contrast to his master Kant, the right of a people to oppose intolerable tyranny. The play was written when Napoleon was at the height of his power, and it owed its enormous success to the circumstance that it was later taken to be a picture of the German struggle for freedom. It is possible that Schiller, if he

¹ Meinecke, loc. cit., p. 53 ff.

² *Schillers Briefe an Körner*, i, p. 332. To Jacobi he wrote: "It is the privilege and the duty of the philosopher and the poet not to belong to any people nor to any age but to be in the true sense of the word the contemporary of all ages."—Jacobi's *auserlesener Briefwechsel*, ii, p. 196.

had lived through the wars of liberation, might have arrived at a positive national attitude, and become one of the protagonists of the national movement.

Schiller was not a democrat. Even in *Fiesko* he had ridiculed the rule of the majority, and in *Demetrius*, which was unfinished when he died, he used very strong words against the "nonsense of the majority":

*Was ist die Mehrheit? Mehrheit ist der Unsinn,
Verstand ist stets bei Wenigen nur gewesen.
Man soll die Stimmen wägen und nicht zählen,
Der Staat muss untergehen, früh oder spät,
Wo Mehrheit siegt und Unverstand entscheidet.*¹

Here is shown that contempt for the masses which is so characteristic of the intellectuals of the time, but Schiller certainly did not intend to defend unlimited despotism, as has been claimed on the strength of these lines. This attitude merely proves again that the question of political organisation did not interest him.

The cultural influence which the German Classicists exercised on the next generation can hardly be over-estimated. It was therefore not to remain without importance to the development of political thought in Germany that the spiritual leaders of the nation were, on the political side, individualists and sceptics.

¹ "What is the majority? the majority is nonsense, understanding has ever been with a few only. The votes should be weighed and not counted; the State must perish, sooner or later, where the majority conquers and stupidity decides."—*Demetrius*, Act I.

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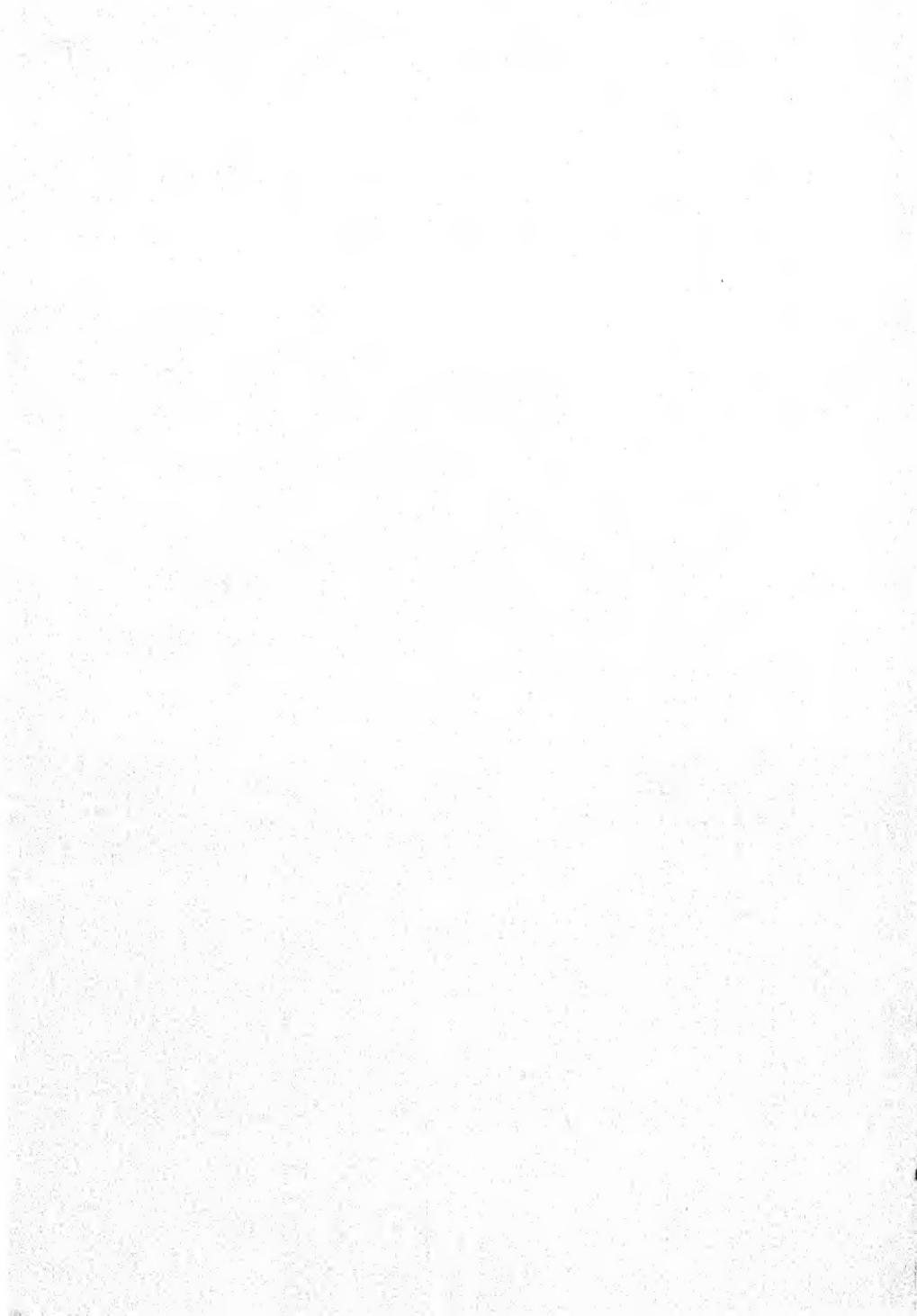
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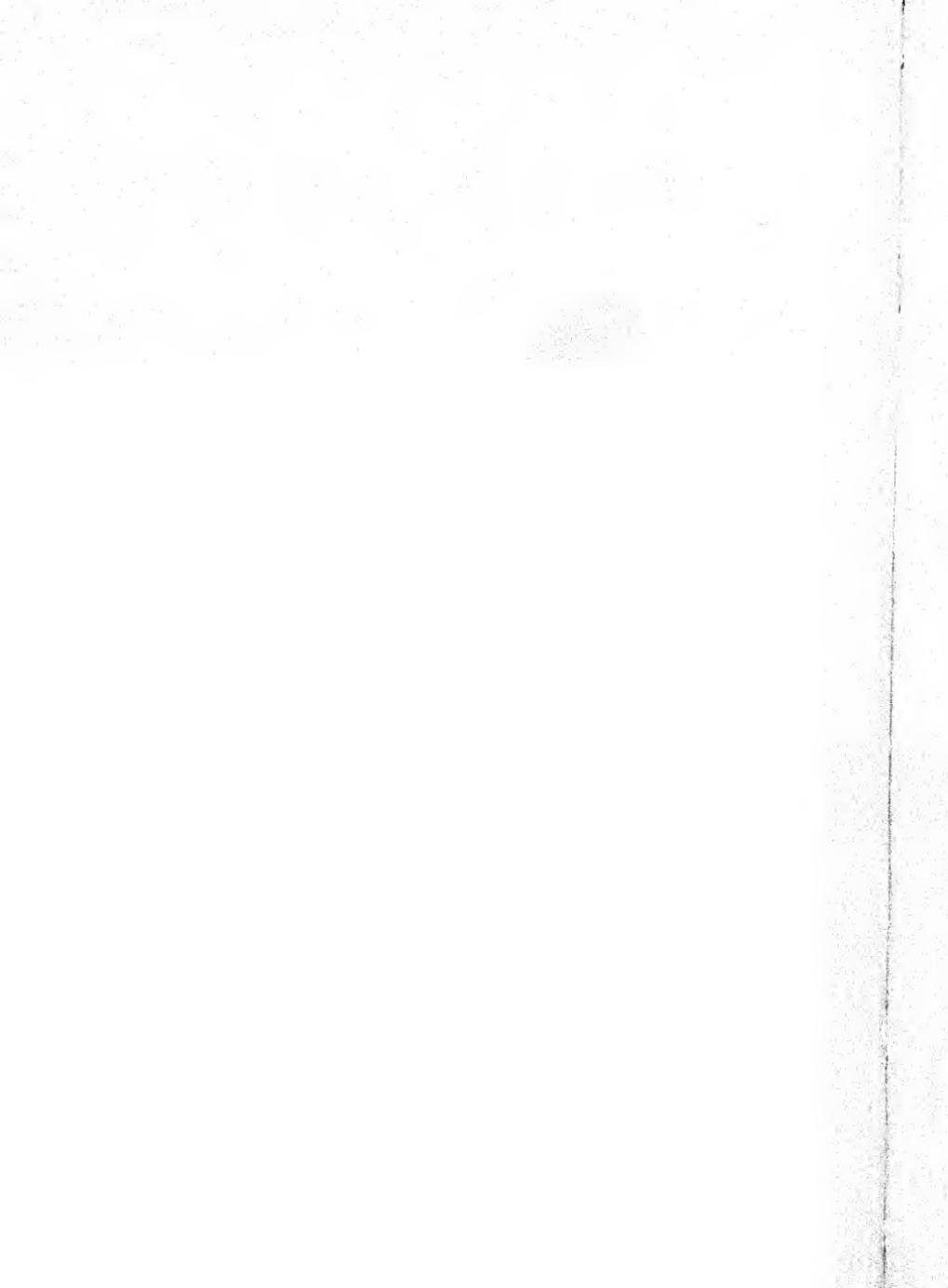
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PART II

THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT



CHAPTER VI

THE ROMANTIC ATTITUDE

IT is difficult to give a cross-section of German life as it must have appeared to an intelligent observer in about 1800. Since the Empire was merely a geographical expression there was too much diversity in the social conditions to permit a general analysis. If this observer had deduced from the rich intellectual movement of the last quarter of the eighteenth century that there were also strong and determined political forces at work which would bring about the necessary political re-organisation, he would have been greatly mistaken. Those forces which the French Revolution had aroused had proved too weak and the movement which they had originated had almost completely come to a stand-still. The middle classes were taking an outstanding part in the field of art, literature and science, but they were as far as ever from exerting any influence on the government. Even their greatest political philosopher, Kant, had not pointed the way to reforms which might have ensured the political collaboration of the masses on which the welfare of the commonwealth depended. Germany in 1800 seemed to be stagnant and incapable of reforms. Yet the next fifteen years were to produce the greatest changes which she had undergone since the Thirty Years War. These changes amounted to a revolution, but it was a revolution which was entirely the result of pressure from outside and not, as in France and England, the result of an internal struggle for power. It was to a large extent a revolution from above.

There had been a few men who already realised the importance of the problem of German unification, but it was during these decisive years that this problem was pushed into the centre of discussion. The future of Germany depended on the ability of the middle classes to use the strength, which the national

struggle against Napoleon inevitably gave to them, for the establishment of constitutional government. The invasion of Napoleon gave them their chance to achieve the same success which the middle classes had achieved in England and in France. If we want to understand why they missed this chance we have to analyse the political ideas of their leaders. It is customary to treat the Romantic movement entirely as a literary movement and to forget that the Romantics, though they were not the spokesmen of the political ideals of the majority of the middle class, revealed at least the significant fact that men who might have been political leaders took resort to dreams and utopian ideals.

To the Romantic facts in themselves meant nothing. "We seek always the absolute and find always only things," Novalis complained. This utterance of the greatest of all Romantics—perhaps the best formula for the Romantic attitude—shows his unbounded contempt for reality. How deep was this contempt is revealed by the pathetic attempt of the poet to commit suicide after the death of his bride by the mere exertion of his will. Can one imagine a greater contempt of reality than is found in this attitude which pretends to give our will such a power over death?

This contempt for facts is further revealed in the Romantic philosophy, especially in its doctrine of the "Contrast." A fact is never considered as such, even does not exist as such. Every fact can only be understood as the counterpart of and contrast to another. The world is a complicated system of such contrasts, and life as the Romantic conceived it pulsates between them. It is obvious from these few remarks that it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to define the attitude of a man who always escapes into the contrast. To him not the things as we encounter them are real, but only their interrelation. We cannot discuss here the absurd consequences to which this attitude leads the Romantic, for us it suffices to notice that to him life is the fluctuating product of his imagination. Inanimate things become animate, and there is mutual love

not only between human beings but also between objects and their possessors.

Adam Müller, the political thinker *par excellence* among the Romantics, began his career by writing an essay on the Contrast,¹ and went so far as to propose to the Prussian Minister, Hardenberg, that he should edit two journals on behalf of the Prussian state, one official and the other as an opposition paper.² It was not from opportunism that he made this strange offer but because he was convinced that by stating the case for two opposing political positions he would be sure to arrive at the truth.

It is no wonder that the Romantic movement appears as a wild and impenetrable garden in which it is very difficult to find one's way. Yet if we begin to cut down the thickets we risk destroying the essential quality of Romanticism.

Every critic of Romanticism has a tendency to overstress certain characteristics and to neglect others. There are few epochs in the intellectual development of Germany about which so much has been written as about the Romantic period. It seems as if the historians had tried again and again to master the obstinate material, the formlessness of which attracted and repelled them at the same time. There have been countless attempts to determine the essence of Romanticism and to link it up with other intellectual currents of the time. Since Rudolph Haym wrote the history of the Romantic school as the history of a literary revolution, scholars have tried to solve the puzzling problem of the character and meaning of this movement.³ This problem has been tackled from all possible angles, and psychology, philosophy and sociology have been called in to throw light on it.

There are about as many definitions of Romanticism as there are books on it. One investigator describes the Romantic attitude as the desire to escape from the monotony of everyday

¹ *Die Lehre vom Gegensatz*, published in 1804.

² *Briefe und Aktenstücke zur Geschichte Preussens unter Friedrich Wilhelm III*, ed. by Rühl, vol. i, p. 116 ff.

³ Cf. R. Haym, *Die Romantische Schule*, p. 14 and *passim*.

life,¹ for another the essential characteristic is the inability of the Romantic to come to any decision. Others have seen in it a typical product of the German mind, and there are many who are inclined to agree with Goethe when he described Romanticism as unsound, in contradiction to Classicism which he considered as essentially sound.²

The list of attempts to determine the essence of Romanticism could easily be increased, but it is sufficient to mention the rich variety of these attempts in order to show the difficulty of the task. We are thus led to wonder whether it is at all possible to deal with Romanticism in a systematic way. Is it not more profitable to admit that Romanticism is something obscure and inconsistent, a vague and unsound attitude towards life which we encounter in certain periods, but which we had better treat as a transient aberration from the normal course? This question, however, need only be raised to be answered in the negative. Obscure and indefinite, almost indefinable as Romanticism was, yet it was a distinct phase in the history of the intellectual development in Germany and exerted a powerful and lasting influence in many directions.

All attempts to describe or to explain the phenomenon which we call Romanticism have suffered from two fatal mistakes. The first mistake is so obvious that it is difficult to understand why it has been committed again and again. Many students, puzzled by the problem of the Romantic attitude, have tried to discover a system in the welter of epigrams, ideas and fragments which constitute most of the work of the Romantics. All such attempts are utterly futile. One of the few things which can safely be said of Romanticism is that the Romantic mocks at systems and indulges in evasiveness on principle. The problem with which the Romantic confronts us is not so much what he thought but why he thought in this particular way. All attempts, for instance, to construct anything approaching a system out

¹ Cf. Walzel, *German Romanticism*, p. 3.

² In another passage Goethe identifies "romantisch" and "pathologisch." *Gespräche mit Eckermann*, p. 467.

of Fr. Schlegel's works must inevitably fail, since such a system was not even intended by the author, let alone achieved.

The Romantics themselves strongly resented any attempt to systematise their intellectual adventures. "Definitions are poison for science," Novalis exclaimed without realising that a science without definitions is impossible from the beginning. If we try to reduce Romanticism to a formula we only prevent ourselves from acquiring a true concept of it, since we should apply standards which are incompatible with its character. In his book on Frederick Schlegel, Rouge draws attention to the fact that the Romantics have too often been the victims of the definitions which scholars have applied to Romanticism.¹ Frederick Schlegel himself asserted that no theory could possibly do justice to Romanticism and that only a "divinitory" criticism could hope to catch its essence.²

The attitude of many scholars towards Romanticism is not free from inconsistency. On the one hand they accuse the Romantics of being entirely irrational, on the other they endeavour to squeeze a rational system out of them. Schütze in his book *Academic Illusions* has wittily denounced this method.

The second fatal mistake consists in a complete misrepresentation of the nature of the Romantic movement. Far too much stress has been laid on Romanticism as a purely intellectual movement and too little on its social aspects. The Romantic movement was more than the protest of some intellectuals against established ideas; it expressed the problems with which a whole generation was faced and mirrored the social tendencies of a rapidly changing period. Instead of investigating the social background, the critics have contented themselves with vague generalisations. Where this method leads to can best be illustrated by Petersen's book on Romanticism. According to him the reciprocal relations of the generations which succeeded one another in Germany's cultural history about the turn of the eighteenth century can be considered in terms of the Hegelian

¹ Rouge, *F. R. Schlegel*, p. x.

² Fr. Schlegel, *prosaische Jugendschriften*, vol. ii, p. 221.

triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The rationalistic thesis finds its direct antithesis in the irrationalism of the *Storm and Stress*. "The Classical period," Petersen continues, "re-establishes the equilibrium between rationalism and irrationalism, in the philosophy of Kant, in Goethe's and Schiller's theories of art, in the balance held by life and form in their creative work. It remains for Romanticism merely to identify the irrational elements until the closed circle explodes and is dissolved into a parabola leading to infinitude."¹ Schütze, who quotes this rather obscure passage in his book, ironically points out that a circle certainly does not explode and if it ever should behave in that queer way it would in no circumstances produce a parabola.² This quotation shows to what results this method of investigation leads, it merely connects one ism with another without explaining anything.

One of the reasons for the over-stressing of the intellectual aspect of the Romantic movement in researches concerning the Romantic movement is to be found in the prevailing belief that Romanticism was unreal and not concerned with practical political or social problems. Thinkers who admittedly distrusted the Romantic attitude invented the term of "political Romanticism" in order to denounce an attitude which was ridiculously non-political. In their view, politics mean clear-cut activity and interest in the affairs of this life, while Romanticism stands for dream, desire, emotion and remoteness from life. The epithet Romantic has indeed become a term of abuse and contempt in political struggles. Political ideas of which somebody disapproves are termed Romantic as a synonym for utopian and unrealisable. It seems appropriate to remind ourselves that when the term "Romantic" was invented it had a definitely abusive meaning. It was employed to denote the falsity and unreality of some stories, "all that which was imaginary and impossible in them, all that which was contrary to the more rational view of life which was beginning to dominate men's minds."³

¹ Petersen, *die Wesensbestimmung der deutschen Romantik*, pp. 160, 161.

² Schütze, loc. cit., p. 11. ³ Pearsall Smith, *Words and Idioms*, p. 70.

This method of denunciation has been carried to its extreme by Carl Schmitt, who in his book on Romantic political thought discovered the essence of Romanticism in the fact that the Romantic never adhered to any political creed and took every phenomenon only as a pretext for the cultivation of his individuality.¹ "The Romantic subject treats the world as an occasion and an opportunity for his Romantic productivity."² Schmitt quotes a fragment of Novalis which seems to bear out his thesis: "All accidents of our life are material out of which we can produce what we want; everything is first link in an infinite chain, the beginning of an infinite novel."³ Schmitt calls this attitude "subjective occasionalism" and uses this definition to show that Romanticism cannot be identified or connected with any political movement or creed, since the Romantics by definition have no fundamental and lasting convictions. Schmitt in the first place thus strikes at those people who charge the Romantics with having been the accomplices of Restoration and reaction. He thinks to strengthen his argument by pointing out that the Romantics at first hailed the Revolution and became later violently anti-revolutionary, and he sees in this the convincing proof for their non-political attitude and the "occasionalistic" character of their thought. In fact this very argument reveals the weakness of Schmitt's criticism. We have shown that the change from enthusiasm for to antipathy to the Revolution was not confined to Romantics. Gentz, for instance, who was certainly no Romantic, is a case in point. The Romantics changed their attitude towards the Revolution as did most of their contemporaries for quite different reasons from those indicated by Schmitt. It is true that the change in the attitude towards the Revolution took on more violent forms with the Romantics than with others, and there is no doubt that the Romantics began by romanticising the Revolution. The reason for this is clear: the Romantics were young men when they encountered the shock of the Revolution, and when they

¹ *Politische Romantik*, passim.

² Loc. cit., p. 23.

³ Novalis, *Works*, vol. ii, p. 25.

responded to it in a more emotional way than was usual they only expressed earlier than others the general tendency towards emotionalism which characterises the period.

If we examine Schmitt's interpretation more closely we find that brilliant though it is, it is wholly unconvincing. In order to prove his thesis that Romanticism and political unreliability are identical, Schmitt is forced to omit men who are generally held to be Romantics and in fact are typical representatives of Romanticism, as for instance Görres. Görres (who incidentally also changed his attitude towards the Revolution completely) had very distinct political views and had such great political influence that in France his journal was called one of the Great Powers of Europe. If we apply Schmitt's definition, Görres could not be considered a Romantic. Schmitt's argument, moreover, does not hold good in still another respect. Even those men whom he does consider as Romantics do not show those characteristics which he considers essential. Adam Müller, for instance, who, except for a short period of immature enthusiasm, was uncompromisingly hostile towards the Revolution, held quite definite if somewhat utopian political opinions and was very closely connected with Restoration and reaction. The alliance between Romanticism and reaction, which is an historic fact, can be explained on the grounds that both movements grew up in the same political and social environment and they had many things in common though they started from different points. We have to bear in mind that the Revolution was just as much the culmination of the eighteenth century as it was the beginning of a new era in which the whole fabric of established ideas and beliefs was overthrown. Romanticism was in itself a reaction against the ideas of the eighteenth century, it was therefore bound to turn against the Revolution sooner or later. The Restoration was the reaction against the French Revolution in so far as the latter threatened to overturn the old and established social order.

The Romantic movement was carried out by a generation of young men mostly of the middle class who were disillusioned

and dissatisfied with the social order in which they lived and who therefore turned against the ideas which had prevailed during the eighteenth century. Yet there is another point which we have to bear in mind if we want to understand the Romantic attitude. There is a tendency to divide history into clearly marked periods and to overstress the differences between them. Romanticism has been explained as reaction from rationalism and thus historians have set to work to prove that Romanticism was entirely irrational. Others have contrasted Classicism with Romanticism and accordingly have denied to Romanticism all the characteristics which they believed they had found in Classicism. In reality all such contrasts are mere theoretical constructions which might in some cases help us to understand the essence of a phenomenon but which more often lead hopelessly away from the facts.

It is true that the Romantics reacted against rationalism and that they had ideas which were widely different from those of the Classicists. At the same time, however, they remained children of their age and continued to think in terms of rationalism. In the political sphere, for instance, they all were opposed to the concept of Natural Law, but like Fichte they started to think under its influence. We are therefore justified in saying that the amalgamation of a rationalistic method of thought and a highly emotional temperament, the close collaboration of intellect and imagination are outstanding features of the Romantic attitude.¹

One of the most puzzling problems with which Romanticism confronts us is the apparent incompatibility between the excessive individualism of its adherents and the reputation they have acquired of being the first German nationalists. This discrepancy, however, is only insoluble as long as one insists on regarding Romanticism as a mere reaction from the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century, indeed, had been a century of individualism. The individual and his understanding

¹ Coleridge described the Romantic attitude when he wrote: "My opinion is thus: that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling, and that all truth is a species of revelation." *Letters*, ed. E. H. Coleridge, vol. i, p. 351.

were the centre of the world, and to secure the rights of the individual had seemed the most important political problem. The State was considered primarily as an institution for the protection of individuals and was theoretically based on the decision of the individual will to adhere to it. We have shown how Kant and Fichte started from the individual as the unit to which society in the last resort could be reduced. Fichte's philosophy, which stressed or seemed to stress the individual will, had in fact an influence on the Romantics which can hardly be over-estimated.

All the Romantics started as fanatical individualists. At a time in which the whole social order seemed to be collapsing they sought and found the centre of the world in themselves and claimed to be able to change the world through their enthusiastic activity. In this they were in no way different from the young enthusiasts of any other generation, but their significance lies in the fact that for the first time in Germany they constituted what can be called a school.¹ The Classicists had not created such a school, they had all lived and worked independently of each other, and even the famous friendship between Goethe and Schiller had not produced a Classical school. This is a fact of first rate sociological importance. When the Romantics formed their school, in the years from 1790 to 1800, the German middle classes had already acquired a certain self-consciousness in which we can clearly detect the influence of the French Revolution. A society produces schools of thought only if it is to some extent homogeneous, and such a homogeneity had indeed developed, at least in the cultural sphere.

One of the most outstanding effects of the French Revolution had been the general radicalisation of the existing social and political trends. The Romantic movement, in its aspect as a literary revolution, was one of the answers which Germany gave to the French Revolution. The Revolution in its double rôle as executor and destroyer of the ideas of the eighteenth century had fortified and at the same time weakened the forces

¹ The *Göttinger Hainbund* was of little importance.

which represented eighteenth-century society. It had certainly fortified absolutism and reaction at least for a short time, but it also destroyed for ever the foundations of that society by developing the national principle. Individualism was not only the starting-point with the Romantics, it remained their most important intellectual principle. When they defiantly stressed the creative power of the individual, they protested against an era in which the individual was fettered not only by political bonds but also by a shallow rationalism which told him how to think. The reconciliation of the principles of individuality and of nationality became possible through the Romantic's conception of the whole world as a great work of art in which phenomena such as State and nation were single units in a complete pattern.

Some Marxians might be inclined to dismiss the Romantic movement simply as an attempt of the ruling class to protect the existing order against radical attacks. Such an assertion would not bear critical examination, though there is of course an element of truth in it. Some of the later Romantics such as the Junker Arnim were hostile to the Revolution and even to reforms like those carried out by Stein, because they were afraid of losing their privileges, and it is well known that men like Metternich used Romanticism for the justification of the ancient régime. The policy of one of the most famous Romantics on the throne, the Tsar Alexander, shows us how closely Romanticism and reaction were connected. The assertion, however, becomes fallacious if it is used to explain Romanticism exclusively as a clever ruse of the ruling classes to maintain the old order. Most of the Romantics belonged to the middle class; some, like Novalis, were members of the nobility, whose social standard, however, was that of a man of the middle class. No one of the early Romantics realised that the middle class was to become the backbone of the modern State and none of them was aware that Germany's most important problem was that of national unification carried out by a self-conscious middle class. On the contrary, all these thinkers were anti-

bourgeois. In their eyes the bourgeois was the man who uncritically accepts general standards and acquiesces in the present state of affairs. Therefore the Romantics tended to identify the man of the middle class with the Philistine and to idealise the nobility. When accordingly they served the reactionary forces, they did so, not because they were bribed or corrupted, but because they sincerely believed in the superiority of the old feudal order. In order to understand their position we have further to bear in mind that Romanticism was in the first place a literary movement, since cultural activity in the latter part of the eighteenth century expressed itself primarily through literature. The emancipation of the middle classes, it must be remembered, had so far been carried out only in the cultural sphere. As far as political problems are concerned, the Romantics took up the same attitude as the Classicists by retreating from political reality into a sphere of dreams and idylls.

The Romantics, like the Classicists, retreated from an unsatisfactory reality instead of trying to change the existing order. None of them played any active part in politics or had any direct influence on the course of political events. This undoubtedly fact led scholars like Carl Schmitt to the conclusion that they had no political importance whatever and has led many other people to think that they had no political interests. The starting-point for Classicists and Romantics in the political sphere was the same. The men of both movements valued the individual and his intellectual activity more highly than the State, but although the starting-point is the same the two movements diverge fundamentally. Classicism was of no political consequence, its humanistic and aesthetic concepts remained divorced from the decisive political forces in Germany; its greatest representative, Goethe, though he furnished politicians of the future with quotations, was considered a short-sighted egotist, almost a traitor to the German cause, and Schiller's ideas had to be falsified in order to turn him into the spokesman of modern nationalism. The Romantics, on the other hand, in order to express their ideal of individuality, entirely remodelled

the old concept of the State, and they can therefore justly be considered the intellectual founders of German nationalism. Thus they have, even though indirectly and unwittingly, contributed to the solution of the problem of unification. Romantic ideas were taken over by later conservatives; they helped to organise the forces of political catholicism, they were used in the construction of the Holy Alliance and they were employed to keep down liberal demands.¹

All Romantic thinkers greeted the Revolution as a sign that new life was being born. When the Revolution occurred in France there were, however, strong contrary tendencies already at work in Germany. The Revolution as we know began as a cosmopolitan movement propagating rational principles such as the rights of man and threatening to overthrow the whole existing order. In reaction to this threat a strong desire developed in Germany to find a refuge in the historic past and a belief that Germany could only be saved if it trusted to tradition and the law of historic continuity rather than to rational experiments. The process of applying the principle of individuality to such phenomena as State and nation had far-reaching consequences. It greatly helped in working out the organic concept which played such an important part in nineteenth and twentieth-century thought. The Romantics started as literary revolutionaries, shocking the people, amongst others Goethe, and cultivating the past as a protest against the present. A few decades later, fairy tales, folk songs, stories of knights and witches, had become the common property of the people and had greatly strengthened the national consciousness, so that Germans became interested for the first time in the treasures of their literature and poetry. Some of the Romantics, as, for instance, Uhland, even found their way into the liberal movement.

Another point is of even greater importance. In intellectual as in political movements, the pendulum swings just as far to one side as it does to the other. The eighteenth century, despite its great historians, had had a purely rational concept of history;

¹ Cf. Spenle, *Novalis*, appendix, pp. 29, 31.

it was natural that a reaction against this concept should set in and that history should become a purely empirical science. The eighteenth century, likewise, had had a purely rational concept of religion, the natural reaction to which was an emotional and mystical attitude to religion which tended to identify rationalism, protestantism and revolution. All the Romantics were deeply interested in religious problems and were sincerely religious themselves, whereas the Classicists had been free-thinkers. The religious attitude of the Romantics also expressed their dissatisfaction with the existing conditions; it was the yearning for a better and more beautiful world and the protest against the "artificial paganism" of the Classicists. It is significant that most Romantics were brought up as Protestants and were thus most inclined to rebellion since Protestantism was the most rationalistic form of religion. Many of the Romantics reacted against rationalism by becoming Catholics, and though others remained faithful Protestants, yet even they felt a "philosophic and poetic nostalgia" for Catholicism.¹ These religious tendencies allied themselves with the historic outlook and formed that specific fabric of ideas which we shall expound in the following chapters.

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¹ Steffens, *Was ich erlebte*, vol. iv, p. 324.

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CHAPTER VII

THE PRECURSORS

I. JUSTUS MÖSER

Justus Möser is undoubtedly one of the most interesting representatives of the political thought of the eighteenth century in Germany, even if we do not agree with Treitschke, who called him the only strong and original political thinker in Germany at that time.¹ No one clung to the ancient order of society so uncompromisingly, no one turned against new ideas more resolutely than he. Thus he was the spokesman of conservatism at a time when all intellectual activity seemed to be concentrated on attacks against the established order. Möser was not a reformer, but he was still less a reactionary. He simply tried to save that which he thought good from the wealth of ideas, customs and institutions which had been produced in the course of history. His "conservatism" was widely different from nineteenth-century conservatism which grew up as a reaction from the French Revolution and developed the concept of a powerful national state and a coherent system of political philosophy. Möser's attitude, however, which has been described as "traditionalism," represented a frame of mind similar to that in which future conservatives elaborated their theories.

Möser was not a political thinker in the genuine sense of the word. He "does not belong," as his friend and biographer Nicolai wrote, "to those theorising politicians who go about with dreams of an ideal and a perfect Constitution which it is easy to sketch but impossible to execute; he lived in the world of reality and tried to work in it."² Most of his political views and ideas are scattered throughout his *Patriotische Phantasien*, a casual collection of articles which he wrote in his spare time

¹ *Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. i, p. 102.

² Möser, *Collected Works*, vol. x, p. 47.

while he was an official of his small state. Most of these articles were written before the French Revolution and are therefore strictly speaking outside the scope of this work. Nevertheless, it seems appropriate to deal with them in this context not only because they exerted a lasting influence over men like Goethe, but also because they are characteristic of the political thought of an influential section of the population even after the outbreak of the Revolution.

All the thinkers with whom we have dealt so far have two characteristic traits in common; they all turned against the absolutist system and sought to establish a new legitimation for political life which was not the will of the prince. They all protested against absolutism in the name of humanity and tried to minimise the importance of the State in the form in which it had developed historically. Möser was the first of a series of thinkers who believed that the troubles of the present could best be overcome by turning back to the past and by preserving those institutions which by their long duration had proved their worth.

This attitude was in flat contradiction to the spirit of Enlightenment as it had developed after 1750, but nevertheless its appearance was not surprising. It was inevitable that a counter movement should spring up in opposition to the general humanitarian and cosmopolitan tendencies of the time. A number of factors tended to further such a counter movement; first it accorded with the well-known tendency of man to change things only if it is absolutely unavoidable, and it was thus supported by what we can call the political law of inertia. If Germany had adopted the modern ideas in the same degree as France, a revolution with unpredictable consequences would have been inevitable. In Germany, moreover, there existed as we showed in the first chapter a particular dislike of revolutions and remarkably little disposition to unite in common action all the political forces which were scattered throughout the small principalities. More important than this, however, is the fact that in Germany an intellectual life of

high quality which was divorced from politics was developing which seemed to claim all the energy of the productive minds. This was one of the reasons why the intellectual leaders of this movement, in their newly awakened pride in the achievements of German thinkers, were inclined to turn their attention to the historic development of Germany rather than to adopt generalising ideas of alien origin.

Möser was one of the first thinkers in Germany to give expression to this new historic consciousness. To him history meant more than to most men of the Enlightenment. It was no longer, as it had been even for Kant and Schiller, the expression of the continuous progress of reason but the concrete narrative of the intellectual and political life of a nation with particular stress laid on its ancient and time-honoured institutions.

It is extremely characteristic of the political situation of Germany that when Möser devoted himself to historiography he did not undertake to write a history of Germany but of his home, Osnabrück, which enclosed forty-five square miles and had about 125,000 inhabitants. Incidentally, it was under the rule of an English prince. To Möser the idea of a politically united Germany would have appeared as one of those anaemic generalisations which he despised. It required great stimuli from outside to make the conservative minds in Germany take up the idea of a united Reich. For a long time to come this idea was promulgated by the liberals, whereas to the conservatives it simply appeared as a dangerous application of the revolutionary principle of centralisation to German conditions.

Möser was in agreement with the spirit of Enlightenment when he turned against the excesses of despotism. He realised clearly that despotism neglected and destroyed the old feudal order and was just as much the outcome of modern mechanistic thinking as its counterpart, the liberalism of the French Revolution. Möser fought against the absolutist State not because it violated some illusory rights of man, but because

it had decomposed the feudal society, which seemed to him the incarnation of political wisdom. In the same way the Parliaments had fought against the king in France, not because they believed in the ideas of the *philosophes* but because they wished to safeguard their privileges. Möser had no personal axe to grind when he defended feudal society; he was sincerely convinced that the destruction of the old feudal order of society would inevitably lead to radical individualism and even to anarchy. It matters little that Möser was mistaken in his judgment of the political development. More important is the fact that he recognised that benevolent despotism and revolution were the products of the same era and that he paved the way for a new concept of the State, the starting-point of which was no longer the individual but the group.

Möser also realised that Natural Law had rendered valuable services to absolutism. The example of Hobbes shows better than any other how the concept of the Social Contract could be employed for the legitimisation of absolute power. That Natural Law could be invoked by representatives of absolutism as well as by the followers of the theory of the sovereignty of the people can be explained by the fact that the point of departure for all thinkers who thought in terms of Natural Law was the individual.

Möser was filled with a deep mistrust of theories and general laws. Like Savigny thirty years later he denied that in his age legislation was desirable. Like Humboldt he was afraid that too much interference with the life of the individual would produce uniformity and barrenness. "The simpler the laws and the more general the rules become, the more despotic, dry and poor the State becomes," thus he sums up his position. This distrust of laws cannot be entirely explained by pointing out that it was the outcome of an anti-rationalistic feeling. It was the characteristic form of the political diffidence of the middle class which had not yet quite awakened to the fact that the State was not a divine institution but man's work. If Möser believed in ancient customs rather than in generalising laws he

did so because he saw a kind of sacrilege in any interference with the ancient order.

In the case of Möser we see how firmly political thought is rooted in the soil from which the thinker springs. We have already had occasion to remark on the strange political circumstances which prevailed in Osnabrück. In no other part of Germany had the type of the free peasant survived so well as in this district of North-West Germany. Möser himself was a lawyer and the son of a lawyer, but more than any other political thinker he felt himself linked up with the fate of the peasants. The peasant had always been more conservative than the townsman and Möser's chief aim was to make the peasant the cornerstone of the State. He felt a deep distrust of towns and deplored the development which caused the population of the towns to increase at a greater rate than that of the country. There is something idyllic and naïve about his concept of society, and it seems as if he intuitively feared the problems with which the Industrial Revolution was to confront future generations. The faithful attachment of the peasant to the soil seemed to him the best guarantee for a healthy social life. He saw in the relation between the landed proprietor and the land something holy and mysterious, and he was horrified at the thought that it could be turned into a purely legal or economic relationship.

He conceived the State as a company of shareholders and only those were proper citizens who possessed a share in the form of land. In his opinion the State had developed historically from a group of strong men who had first conquered the land and had then concluded a social contract by which they guaranteed their property to one another. Later the proprietors concluded with those who had come too late or had not been strong enough to conquer land for themselves a further contract by which the latter bound themselves to work for the proprietors under conditions imposed upon them. Möser characteristically called these agricultural labourers *Nebenbewohner*¹

¹ Literally, inhabitants who live beside the others.

and he dreamed of a social organisation in which the landless members of society would have no share in the conduct of political affairs, even if they were wealthy merchants. The idea of equality seemed absolutely absurd to him since men, as history teaches us, have never been equal. To demand equal rights for the members of the State would, in his opinion, be just as absurd as to demand that a person who has only a small share in a commercial society should have the same rights as a person with a big share. His ideal was that the possession of land should give the sole title to political rights and that the landed proprietor alone could be a true citizen. He was convinced that only a society based on these principles could lead a healthy national life and would be safe from revolutions.¹ His concept of the State was not exactly that of eighteenth-century feudal society in which the free peasant had almost completely died out, but a State governed by a community of small free landowners. In reality Möser attempted, it is true, to justify feudal society as it had developed though he tried to avoid its hardships. He saw its justification in its long duration. That which had developed historically could claim on that account alone to be useful. Here we discover the first trace of an idea upon which Hegel was to base his philosophy of history.

Like many of his more sober contemporaries Möser realised how dangerous it was to criticise history on the ground of abstract principles. Such criticism might easily lead to a complete reversal of the established social order. Since the feudal lords had wielded their power for centuries, Möser was forced to acknowledge their status unreservedly if he did not want to give up the starting-point of his theories that political power was, in the first place, based on tradition. Had he given up this fundamental conviction he would have been led inevitably to revolutionary conclusions. This furnishes us with an interesting psychological explanation of the reactionary attitude. We have pointed out that Möser was not a reactionary in the sense that he was opposed to reforms altogether, but he was led to

¹ Cf. *Works*, vol. ix, p. 241.

conclusions which in the sphere of practical politics could only have reactionary effects. The reason for this attitude was his fear of anarchy. His reaction was not so much reaction from reforms but reaction from revolution. A revolution, moreover, was particularly undesired in a small country like Osnabrück where a fairly large number of peasants, officials, artisans and merchants enjoyed considerable prosperity. Möser belonged to a group of men who were deeply disquieted by the course of events and who, even before the outbreak of the Revolution, divined that society was in a state of disintegration. They sought, therefore, to find firm ground on which they could stabilize the social life which they saw threatened with dissolution.

Möser, however, could not help realising that in the course of time the feudal order had to a large extent been modified and, above all, that the economic foundation on which it had been based had entirely changed. When feudalism developed during the early Middle Ages land was to all intents and purposes the only form of property, the possession of which determined the political organisation and the distribution of political power. In the meantime, as a consequence of the development of the monetary system, a class of capitalists had grown up who possessed very considerable personal property and who could not be excluded entirely from taking part in ruling the State. Möser acknowledged this fact by admitting that there existed not only shares in landed property but also in personal property, so-called financial shares which entitled their possessor to the same rights as the former.

To Möser all attempts to reform society on general principles seemed to be utterly dangerous since they are not based on experience to which man ought to cling in times of trouble. To Möser, the official of a small state, experience seemed to be more important than theory. He had seen in his own state how institutions which seemed wholly incompatible with reason worked satisfactorily, and he was so rooted in his little

principality with its different systems of law and custom that the idea of a uniform law had no meaning for him. The idea of Natural Law was understood as long as there was a European consciousness expressed in a common language and in the concept of the *universitas mundi*. It became unreal in a time when Europe began to be divided into national states. To Möser as to many people, only those things seemed real which were immediately before his eyes; thus he relied on the historic development in which he had grown up.

Any concept, however, which relies entirely on historic development is bound to lead to contradictions. The thinker who approaches the world by applying abstract principles has an easier task than the bigot of tradition, since he is able to smooth out contradictions in the sphere of thought. The thinker, however, who considers historic development as the sole justification for existing social phenomena has to recognise the fact that this development is often inconsistent and haphazard. Möser, in fact, entangled himself in irreconcilable contradictions. From his point of view as an advocate of a kind of democracy of peasants he should not only have refuted absolutism as he did, but he should also have attacked the institution of serfdom which he had actually defended in theory, though he did much in practice to alleviate its hardships. The Germanic tribes which he loved to quote as witnesses for his ideas did not know serfs. Furthermore, Möser could not help realising that the strong central power of the States which had emerged out of feudal society was necessary to meet modern demands. Those times in which political power had been based exclusively on landed property had passed beyond recall. Möser therefore cherished the idea that landed property should in the last resort belong to the State itself and that all shareholders should hold their property only in trust.¹ In other words, he tried to adapt feudal forms to modern requirements. Feudalism in its original and pure form implied indeed that the prince was the greatest proprietor and the feudal lords

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 300.

only his dependent vassals and sub-owners. The vassals, however, had been transformed in the course of time into autocratic and almost independent owners of their lands. Möser, in an entirely unhistoric way, went back to the original form of feudalism and linked it up with the modern concept of a strong centralised State. In this he was unwittingly in keeping with the necessities of economic development. It was in the interest of the State, which demanded great financial sacrifices from its subjects, that the feudal lords should not bleed their serfs to death. Möser's chief aim as a political writer and as an administrator was therefore to protect serfs as much as he could, and he had an important share in the legislation of Osnabrück which raised the status of the serfs considerably. Thus Möser, in spite of his justification of serfdom, did much to undermine it.

In order to understand Möser's ambiguous attitude towards serfdom, we have to bear in mind that its form was particularly mild in Osnabrück and could not be compared with the conditions which prevailed in the east and other parts of Germany. The serf, who indeed was more rare than in most districts, was not completely without rights, he was protected by old customs and increasingly by state legislation. Möser, moreover, feared that a sudden abolition of serfdom would have disastrous results for the serfs themselves since they would probably get into difficulties as soon as they lost the protection of their lords. The future development in Prussia shows that Möser's fears were not quite without foundation.

Möser demanded some kind of representative assembly to assist the prince in his tasks. But only the landed proprietors and, as a concession to modern developments, the owners of personal property could send representatives, whereas the masses of the non-possessing were entirely excluded from any part in the government.

Möser tried to justify his attitude towards the problem of serfdom in a letter to Nicolai in which he pointed out that his official position did not permit him to annoy the landed

proprietors.¹ In fact his position, like most things in this small commonwealth, was very remarkable. He was not only the counsellor of the Government but was at the same time "syndic" of the "Ritterschaft," the corporation of the landed proprietors. As an official of the Government he carried out those reforms by which feudalism was to be abolished by degrees, as representative of the proprietors he was compelled to voice the feudal opinions of his employers. It testifies to his political wisdom that he was able to fulfil this double task to general satisfaction, but this anomalous position forced him to perpetual compromise. This is reflected in all his political ideas. Only a person who was so averse to theory could be successful in satisfying such divergent interests.

Möser felt a deep veneration for England and its political institutions, with which he was personally familiar.² He admired above all the position which the nobility held in England and he demanded a radical reform of the German nobility according to the English model. He wished nobility to be connected not with a person but with an office or an estate, so that the title and property would be conferred on the elder son.

Möser clung to the end to his denunciation of the absolutist system. "In despotic states," thus he had written even before 1770, "the master is everything and the rest is rabble. The happy constitution is that which descends from the throne in steps and each step has its own degree of honour."³ The concept of honour plays an important part in his system of society. He clung to the ancient guild organisation since he believed that the guilds were the most capable of maintaining the honour of handicraft, and he demanded that artisans should be granted the right to wear arms and uniform. He was convinced that the Nordic peoples, and amongst them particularly the Germans, attributed honour in the first place to the possession of arms and despised those who were not entitled to bear and use them.⁴

¹ Cf. Rupprecht, *Justus Möser's sociale und volkswirtschaftliche Anschauungen*, p. 15. ² Cf. *Preussische Jahrbücher*, vol. ccxxvii, p. 60.

³ *Works*, vol. i, p. 115.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 279.

It is not surprising that Möser was hostile towards the French Revolution. He was horrified by the attempt to demolish tradition and to build a Constitution afresh. In his opinion it was "Manifest outrage if the second class (the class of the non-possessing) should come together, declare themselves and the members of the first class human beings and arrogate to themselves the right of disposing of the landed property."¹ This utterance is highly characteristic; it did not occur to Möser that it was not necessary for any man to be declared a human being. What he wanted to denounce was the attempt of the revolutionaries to base rights on general human principles instead of on their traditional laws and customs. His thought was concentrated not on the abstract human being, the member of mankind, but on the concrete citizen as he had grown up in his particular social environment.² Man in his opinion "was born for society, and it is of little use to regard him in an isolated state."

It has been mentioned that Möser was in keeping with eighteenth-century thought inasmuch as the idea of nationality meant nothing to him. He was convinced that the smaller the political unit, the stronger would be that spirit of collaboration which he considered to be one of the most important driving forces in political life. It was for this reason that he demanded that every town ought to have its own constitution to meet its particular needs. He saw one of the main reasons for the greatness of Greece in the fact "that every little town had created for itself its own religion and political Constitution and had developed its power to extraordinary greatness by means of those Constitutions."³

In Möser's political philosophy, ideas of the Enlightenment are blended with those of feudal origin. His avowed aim was

¹ *Works*, vol. v, p. 182.

² We remember De Maistre's phrase: "J'ai vu, dans ma vie, des Français, des Italiens, des Russes, etc.; je sais même, grâces à Montesquieu, qu'on peut être Persan, mais quant à l'homme, je déclare ne l'avoir rencontré de ma vie; s'il existe, c'est bien à mon insu." *Considérations sur la France*, p. 102.

³ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 68.

to promote as much happiness amongst the people as possible. His ideal was a state in which the prince cares for his subjects with wise foresight, but in which at the same time a vigorous class of peasants constitutes a counter-balance against absolute power. He was entirely in accordance with ideas of the Enlightenment when he demanded that the supervision of the prince should go very far, even to the extent of forbidding his subjects to drink coffee because it was injurious.¹ On the other hand he raised modern demands when he insisted that the landowners should elect a representative body which would decide important questions, above all the amount of taxation.

Möser was a typical representative of a group of able officials who had no opportunity to develop their ability in their small domain to the full, but who nevertheless did much to keep up the standard of political life in the small states. Men of this calibre, working in the service of a more important state, were to build up the political organisation of Germany on an entirely new basis.

Möser's immediate influence on his contemporaries was small outside his own country. This is natural when one remembers that his writings dealt only with limited conditions. His indirect influence was all the stronger, that is to say, the influence which he exerted on other thinkers who themselves had a wider public and who found in his limitations a particular attraction. We have mentioned Goethe already as one whose political views were decidedly influenced by Möser. Egmont and Götz are not the advocates of abstract humanitarian principles but fighters for the traditional rights of the estates, and they find themselves therefore in an embittered struggle with the representatives of a sinister absolutism. By refuting the theory of Natural Law and insisting on the value of tradition, Möser paved the way for Burke's influence on German political thought.

Möser's political ideas were soon forgotten since they were

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 165.

the expression of a social order which was irrevocably doomed. Agriculture in Germany declined in importance as industry increased, and the country needed above all things political unity in order to be able to participate in the gigantic struggle for markets which was to accompany the Industrial Revolution. It was impossible to turn back the wheel of economic development and to revive feudal society. The class of the non-possessing and landless was soon to become too numerous for all attempts to exclude them entirely from a share in the control of the State.

Möser, in spite of his particularism, has nevertheless an important share in the construction of a new and united Germany, though he did not even dream of such a thing as an Imperial Germany under Prussia's leadership. By directing his contemporaries to the study of German history he helped to awaken that strong national self-consciousness without which the task of unity could never have been achieved. Although Möser was by no means a Romantic, he can be counted as one of the precursors of the Romantic movement.

II. HERDER

The importance of Herder in the intellectual life of eighteenth-century Germany is undeniable; all the intellectual movements of the last quarter of the century, Storm and Stress, Classicism and Romanticism, bear the impress of his mind, and the stimulus of his ideas is still working though his works are no longer read. The movement which he influenced most strongly was Romanticism, which is not surprising since there is no other thinker of the period in whose works anti-rational tendencies found such strong expression as in his. Thus we are justified in dealing with his political ideas in a chapter on Romanticism, although Herder was no more a Romantic than was Justus Möser. He was an old and disappointed man when the Romantics started to shock and challenge their contemporaries and he strongly disagreed with their application of his ideas.

He was too systematic a thinker to be pleased by the Romantics' love for epigrams, and their mysticism was strange and even repulsive to him.

Herder, too, was not a political thinker in the true sense of the word and political ideas form a very small part of his vast intellectual output. He has contributed nothing to the solution of the great problems with which the political thinker is occupied. We do not even find that he attempted to determine the relation between the individual and the State, and we seek in vain for proposals as to how the State ought to be organised. And yet it is not without reason that Herder has been called the German Rousseau.¹ His importance for the history of political thought lies in the fact that he has stimulated and influenced such different thinkers as Fichte, Schelling, F. Schlegel and Hegel and that he was the intellectual father of the national movement, not only in Germany but also in those parts of Europe in which Slavs fought for their political independence.² His attempt to elaborate a philosophy of history, that is to say, to discover in history an inherent principle of development, can be regarded as a preliminary study for Hegel. His efforts to revive and preserve the ancient poetry of the nation were a factor in the growth of a national consciousness in Germany which can hardly be overestimated.

Herder's life furnishes us with a revealing insight into the political and social conditions of his time, and the development of his political ideas can, to a large extent, be regarded as typical of the general trend of political thought in his day. Like Kant, he was born in East Prussia, the son of poor people. East Prussia was one of the most backward districts of the kingdom, the feudal system was still in full force and a small group of junkers ruled over the mass of the illiterate populace. Throughout his life Herder retained a deep dislike of Prussia, a dislike which has gained for him in France the title of the "Prussien Libéré." His adverse opinion of Frederick the

¹ Cf. Korff in *Aufriss der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, p. 126.

² Cf. Ritter von Srbik, *Deutsche Einheit*, vol. i, p. 300.

Great's work and personality, understandable in a man who loved German literature, had some influence on the Romantics, and he repeatedly confessed himself a staunch adversary of Prussian militarism. "How this military discipline," he wrote from Königsberg, "paralyses the poor people in Prussia with fear and wretched slavery! They hardly venture to reflect or to think anything of themselves."¹

His attitude towards Prussia proves that his understanding of the political problems which were to be solved in Germany was not very deep. He was of the opinion that the Prussians would not be happy till their state had been broken into pieces.² Like Möser he had no idea of the vital part which Prussia was to play in the struggle for German unity and of the merits which the absolute system had for the development of the concept and form of the modern State.

His dislike of all forms of absolutism was rooted in the experiences of his youth. These experiences not only filled him with a dislike for absolutism but also prevented him from viewing the State objectively. Herder became politically disillusioned and uninterested, although the study of his autobiography shows us that he was not always so. As a young man he went as a teacher to a school in Riga and while he was living there he took a great interest in the political life of that ancient town. Riga belonged then to Russia and we know from Herder's diary that he planned to write a political treatise for Catherine the Great in which he intended to give a compendium of the art of government. Like most of his contemporaries he reacted against the absolutist system by bringing forward ideas of reform. He even cherished the ambitious hope of interfering actively as a politician in the fate of Finland and of turning it into a kind of model state. It was his fate, however, that he was never to return to Finland after he had left it. He became a theologian and spent the rest of his life in the service of small states and he never again found any opportunity for political activity. If Germany did not produce political

¹ *Erinnerungen*, vol. i, p. 24.

² *Works*, vol. iv, p. 405 ff.

thinkers of the first order in this period it was to a large extent because there was no scope for political talents.

One trait which we have already discovered in Kant and which we encounter in almost all thinkers of the period is conspicuous also in Herder: his obvious and complete subjection to the given political order. Kant had at once retreated before a decree of the Prussian king, Goethe did nothing to assist Fichte in his conflict with the government and Herder anxiously withheld from publication everything which could possibly be regarded as subversive.¹ Despotism in Germany, the *terra oboedientiae*,² had not only prevented political unity but it had also discouraged men from political activity to such an extent that even the intellectual leaders of the nation did not dare to express their opinions. Herder realised himself the stifling effect which absolutism had on political life when he wrote: "Tyrants engender slaves, quibbles, pedants, flatterers and mean and cringing souls, this history shows. Together with government, education decays and with it science, freedom, the courage of the people, everything."³

The silence of public opinion in Germany shows us that the governmental system was more stable than the *ancien régime* in France, where the authorities were unable to suppress revolutionary writings which appeared by the thousand. It would be unjust to charge the German thinkers with cowardice as posterity is so apt to do. What effect would it have had if someone had become a martyr? Probably very little, as is shown by the fate of Schubart who languished in prison for ten years without producing any political effect outside Württemberg. The struggle against the centralised system in France was so much easier than the struggle against the dozens of small princes in Germany. It was easier to distribute forbidden books than in Germany where every ruler was able to supervise his small district. The consciousness, moreover,

¹ Cf. the suppressed sketches for the *Humanitätsbriefe*, *Works*, vol. xviii, p. 348.

² Herder, *Works*, vol. xviii, p. 535.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. ix, p. 365.

that the scope of all political activity must always be limited was bound to hamper all activity from the outset.

Herder was one of the first and most important fighters against Enlightenment in Germany. He was repelled by its rationalism and he carried the struggle into all spheres of thought. In this context we are primarily concerned with his historical views. Herder turned with determination against the concept of history as it had been put forward by the thinkers of the Enlightenment. He never ceased to scoff at a concept according to which the study of history was nothing but an attempt to prove that mankind had attained perfection or was on the point of doing so. He repudiated the arrogance with which these thinkers criticised the past from their rational point of view. Herder clearly recognised that as long as this method was applied a science of history in the true sense was impossible.

If the thinkers of the period of the Enlightenment tried to prove that the present was already enlightened or at least, as Kant expressed it, was an age of Enlightenment, they wished no doubt to exert an educational influence on their contemporaries. At the same time these speculations were an attempt to idealise an unsatisfactory present. In order to maintain their assertion of continuous progress these thinkers were forced to do violence to the historic facts. They had to omit facts or even whole periods such as the Middle Ages as incompatible with their main premise and they had to exaggerate the significance of other facts. There was, however, bound to be a reaction against such a concept of history. Dissatisfaction with the existing order grew in proportion as men began to realise the contrast between reality and the ideas of the Enlightenment. Men became more and more unwilling to put up with the existing order as the goal of historic development. On the other hand the desire for a philosophic explanation of history remained undiminished, that is to say, people demanded an interpretation of history and were not content to regard history as a haphazard accumulation of facts. They did not want the

facts alone, but desired also to recognise the meaning of these facts and the principles which lay behind them. The interest in the past remained as strong as ever, it even increased in proportion as the intellectual life expanded and became intensified in Germany. The starting-point of the study of history, however, changed fundamentally. If thinkers had hitherto sought to find in history the proof that mankind was incessantly progressing they now sought in the past a means of escape from the present. The writers of the Enlightenment had idealised the present, the new generation idealised the past. The discontent with the present found expression in the desire to live in the past or at least to reconstruct the past as far as possible. This idealisation of the past may be considered as the chief characteristic of the Romantic attitude.

Herder's chief aim was to discover the principle of unity in the vast variety of historical facts. In this he differed in no way from the thinkers of the Enlightenment. He differed essentially from them, however, inasmuch as he did not see in every historical phenomenon only a means to an end, but saw in each the expression of a continuous development. He demanded above all that every epoch should be interpreted according to its own particular spirit. Thus he refrained from dealing out marks as the historian of the Enlightenment tended to do, and he undertook to judge every period on its merits. Herder's philosophic attitude can be summed up in Haym's phrase according to which "the variety of existence represented itself to Herder as a continuous growth."¹ Thus the Middle Ages were for him no longer simply the ages of darkness or barbarity but an epoch in which he found a highly developed civilisation. As a young man he had already drawn Goethe's attention to Gothic art as the specifically mediaeval art and pronounced it to be the greatest and most typical achievement of German civilisation.

Herder's revaluation of the Middle Ages exerted an influence which can hardly be over-estimated. That the Romantics

¹ Haym, *Herder*, ii, p. 194.

devoted themselves with such ardour to mediaeval studies was due to a large extent to Herder's influence. Herder himself was far from possessing an emotional enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, a fact which also shows that he was no Romantic in the proper sense. In his chief work he even modified opinions which he had expressed earlier and he took up a somewhat critical attitude towards mediaeval civilisation.

If we want to understand Herder's speculation in the sphere of the philosophy of history, we must keep in mind that he was a theologian by profession. He was a pantheist and his fundamental idea was "that the wise and benevolent creator of the universe must have put a wise and benevolent plan into the destiny and organisation of mankind, into the order of time and space."¹ It seemed impossible to him, therefore, to dismiss the Middle Ages simply as an age of darkness. The objection might well be raised here that Herder thus came very near to the thought of the Enlightenment except that his guiding principle was not progress but God. We must remember, however, that as a pantheist Herder saw God present in all phenomena so that his theological convictions did not prevent him from doing justice to historical reality.

Herder's ideal was that of humanity. This also is familiar to us as a catchword of the Enlightenment. Herder never explained exactly what he meant by it, and indeed this concept seems extraordinarily vague. He no doubt adopted it from the thought of the Enlightenment and did not succeed in bringing it into harmony with his other ideas. Most of the inconsistencies of his chief work are due to this fact. This obscurity reveals itself particularly when Herder leaves open the question whether the ideal which he calls humanity was an end which could be obtained by the individual or only by mankind as a whole. In the first part of the *Ideen* he pointed out that man was not the end of development, nor nature's last word and that humanity continues to develop in a life beyond this world. This speculation, as can be clearly seen, has nothing to do with

¹ Haym, op. cit., p. 194.

history and Herder in fact in the continuation of his work did not pursue this line of thought.

Herder's chief contribution to political thought in Germany consists in the stimulus which he, more than any other single thinker, gave to the development of a national consciousness in Germany. Herder's contemporaries had begun to lose their faith in the pure and abstract ideal of humanity which had been the heritage of the Middle Ages. This ideal had been refuted too clearly by the reality of the development of strong national states. The French Revolution inflicted the last blow on the prevailing cosmopolitanism when it developed from a humanitarian into a national movement. "Carried away by the idea of a universal love of mankind the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century saw in the existing nationalities nothing but deviations from pure humanity which the modern enlightened man with a cosmopolitan sense must strive to remove," thus Jastrow aptly formulated the prevailing attitude towards nationalism before the French Revolution.¹ Herder, however, saw in national units not hindrances to but representations of humanity. Herder was a child of the Enlightenment and as such he kept the ideal of humanity, but he stripped this concept entirely of its rationalistic character. To him humanity had many sides and every nation represents one of them. Thus Herder reconciled his humanitarian with his nationalist concept without becoming unfaithful to the guiding idea of the Enlightenment, that of universal progress. Fichte in his national period adopted this idea and developed it in his famous speeches. There can be no doubt of Herder's deep sense of nationality. He exhorted his contemporaries again and again not merely to imitate foreign peoples but to become aware of Germany's own strength. He suffered deeply from the contempt in which Germany was held by other nations. "A nation which does not esteem itself, how can others regard it as worthy of esteem?" he asked angrily.²

¹ *Geschichte des deutschen Einheitstraumes und seine Erfüllung*, p. 70.

² *Works*, vol. xviii, p. 112.

For the thinkers of the eighteenth century the concept of nation had no political significance. For most of them the people was the mass of illiterate inhabitants of a country who were a necessary part of the social body but who were generally despised. The possibility of seeing in the people the incarnation of culture would have seemed utterly ridiculous to these men. Herder developed the idea of the people as an organic entity, constituted by common historical and cultural experiences. He was the father of that mystic cult of the people which did not simply result in the resuscitation of folk songs but was to play an important part in Germany's history. Herder himself approached this problem from the philosopher's point of view, and he came almost unconsciously to political conclusions of the first importance. He was perhaps the first thinker in Germany who, if he did not demand, at least implied the right of self-determination of the nation. "The most natural state is one nationality with one national character,"¹ thus he formulated this far-reaching principle, still employing terms of Natural Law, and he protested repeatedly against attempts to combine different nations into one state. His influence in this respect has been widely felt as may be illustrated by the fact that the Slavs in their efforts to resuscitate Slavonic cultural and political life called Herder one of the spiritual fathers of their movement.

In the same way in which Herder had protested against a concept of history according to which the past was only a kind of prelude to an idealised present, he turned against all attempts to combine that which nature has separated into one vague concept of humanity. He demanded, moreover, that as every epoch ought to be judged according to its own merits, so every people, or more correctly every nationality, ought to be considered as an independent and organic unity. Herder had come to this conclusion chiefly through his study of the essence of language. He conceived language "as the receptacle in which the ideas of a nation form and preserve themselves and are communicated."² Thus he became convinced that every

¹ *Works*, vol. xiii, p. 383.

² *Ideen*, book II.

nationality had special characteristics of its own which should be explored. This idea seems to us so obvious that we might be inclined to dismiss it as a truism. Herder no doubt lost himself in metaphysical speculations which have often been ridiculed but which do not impair the intrinsic value of his results. When he pronounced that language and poetry were the products of a specific "folk-soul" he only used a metaphysical metaphor for the sound conviction that there can be discovered in every people an intellectual movement which is influenced and determined by its tradition and environment. The age of the French Revolution was the culmination of a period of radical individualism. Herder transferred the concept of individuality on to the national group. Nationalities to him were immense individuals. From this it clearly follows that Herder's nationalism has nothing in common with modern nationalism. Herder's nationalism found its roots and its limits in his humanism.¹ It is fundamentally distinguished from modern nationalism by the fact that it had no connection with the idea of a powerful and centralised modern state. This nationalism was as it were spiritual and ethical rather than political, and it lacked any aggressive tendency. "Love of nationality," Herder wrote, "must not prevent us from recognising the good which can only be achieved by the progress of ages and nations." In Herder's view nations were not strong political units which had formed themselves into a state in order to conquer an empire, or at least to defend their possessions against other nations; for him nations were groups whose civilisation represents the particular contribution of that group to the civilisation of mankind. In Herder's eyes, history is the sequence and the collaboration of national organisms "which have this in common that there is a tendency inherent in each to express itself to its fullest capacity." Here again we notice that the mediaeval idea of the *universitas mundi*, though strongly shaken by the Reformation, was still effective in a more subtle and spiritualised form. Herder's nationalism is the link between

¹ Cf. Meinecke, loc. cit., p. 39.

the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and modern nationalism, it was the form which was most natural to a generation which valued ethics more than politics and had no confidence in the State. The modern concept of the national state did not emerge till the awakening national consciousness allied itself with the state already created by absolutism and till the economic development required strong economic units. This happened in Germany particularly late since here the strong centralised power was absent. Patriotism in the modern sense developed first in the only state in Germany with a strong political energy, in Prussia, and it is no wonder that the question of German unity was finally solved by Prussian politicians and under Prussian leadership.

Herder was not a German nationalist in the sense that he conceived of a united German state. Although voices began to be heard which spoke of a German nation, the vast majority of the people and most of the political thinkers still employed the old terminology according to which a nation was any population which was united in a commonwealth. Thus people talked of the nation of Mainz, and the Abbé of Malmédy announced shortly before the outbreak of the French Revolution that he was going to call a national assembly in his tiny country.¹ As late as 1805 Johannes von Müller wrote to Adam Müller that the unity of Germany would mean the end of Europe.² One reason for this is no doubt the strong influence of the ideas of Enlightenment even on thinkers like Herder. It had been one of the favourite ideas of political thought of the eighteenth century that small states were better than larger ones and that they were better adapted to the promotion of general prosperity.³ We find this belief in such diverse thinkers as Hume and Rousseau, Möser and Johannes von Müller, and we have shown in the first chapter how widely this belief was held in Germany. As this enumeration illustrates, faith in

¹ Hansen, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 474; vol. ii, pp. 500, 570, 651.

² *Briefwechsel zwischen Gentz und Adam Müller*, p. 43.

³ Cf. Sieber, *Die Idee des Klein-Staats bei den Denkern des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Basel, 1920.

small states was shared not only by typical thinkers of the Enlightenment but also by those who, like Rousseau and Möser, went far beyond the ideas of the Enlightenment. Men like Hume believed in small states because they were convinced that in them moral perfection could best be achieved.¹ Rousseau was in favour of small states because he realised that only in them could representation be avoided. Möser favoured small states because he thought that in them tradition and custom, which formed in his opinion the backbone of political life, would be best preserved.

In Germany this theory fell on particularly fertile soil since it corresponded to the political reality and could be used for the justification of the *status quo*. Many people, of course, were all for small states because they were afraid of losing their positions if unification were effected. More important than this, however, was the fact that the political disruption of Germany absolutely prevented the thinkers from even conceiving of a united Germany. The fate of the Holy Roman Empire certainly did not invite speculation to this effect. Thus Herder only expressed a common opinion when he saw no chance for the establishment of a German nation, even though he complained bitterly of Germany's dismemberment. In a memorandum which he composed for the Margrave of Baden he contented himself with proposing the propagation of sound ideas as the best means for the establishment of unity. The question of German unity was in his eyes not a political but a cultural problem. We may call this belief naïve, but we must not forget that the intellectual preparation of the German people for the national State was the first step towards unification and that Herder made a considerable contribution to the solution of the problem of unity.

Herder's concept of the State is entirely determined by the political thought of the Enlightenment and is therefore in

¹ Cf. Hume, *Essays*, The New Universal Library, p. 85; cf. also the instructive speech of the Curator of Bonn in 1789, printed by Hansen, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 478 ff.

strange contrast to his concept of history. His ideas in this respect are particularly confused and inconsistent, and it is very characteristic that he admitted in a letter which he wrote to Haman in April 1785, with reference to the *Ideen*, that "Some passages in this part have caused me terrible trouble without giving me satisfaction even now, particularly the *caput mortuum* of the government."

It was entirely in accordance with the ideas of benevolent despotism when he wrote: "The State is the mother of all children, it must care for the health, strength and innocence of all."¹ In another passage he described the State, as most thinkers of the Enlightenment did, as a machine.² The fundamental feature of his attitude is a deep distrust of the State which we might be entitled to trace to the experiences of his youth. "He who demands enlightenment from a state as such, who believes that the public or the ruler ought to give him education and happiness, speaks an unintelligible language."³

Herder had no idea that the State could be conceived as a corporation or as a political unit which was subject to particular laws. He saw in all forms of government "only a means to help every individual to the free enjoyment of life or a necessary evil which has to be endured for the sake of the ultimate end, the furtherance of humanity."⁴

Like the young Fichte, he longed for the time when the State would have disappeared entirely. "The people," thus we read in a sketch which was excluded from publication, "needs a master as long as it has no understanding of its own; the more it acquires understanding, the more government is bound to mitigate its methods and finally to disappear. The most noble end of government, therefore, is to become dispensable so that everybody may govern himself."⁵ This passage may be interpreted as a profession in favour of democracy, but

¹ *Works*, vol. ix, p. 401.

² *Ibid.*, vol. xiii, p. 340.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. xiii, p. 453. This, however, is contradicted in another passage in which the State is called the finest work of art produced by mankind. *Ideen*, Book ix, ch. iv.

⁴ Haym, loc. cit., ii, p. 467.

⁵ *Works*, vol. xiii, p. 456.

in reality it was nothing but an expression of that vague humanitarianism and deep distrust of the State which was the political creed of most educated Germans in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In an essay on the influence of government on the sciences, which was one of his earliest writings and to which the Academy in Berlin awarded a prize, he expounded the thesis that despotism was detrimental to the development of civilisation. He maintained that only liberty would engender eloquence and further sciences.¹ This essay was not very original since Herder merely transcribed Hume, for whom he had the greatest admiration, but he recognised in it the historic character of the State and acknowledged in contradiction to his later views that the State was a necessary institution and not merely an invention.²

Herder strongly denied Hobbes's theory of the struggle of all against all. He called Hobbes and Machiavelli "base and cold misanthropes."³ Although he recognised the instinct of self-preservation as a natural and legitimate one, man in his opinion is born for society and the *status socialis* is at the same time the *status naturalis*. Thus in spite of his individualistic starting-point, he had a clear idea of the nature of society. "Since the individual," he wrote, "cannot well exist in isolation, a higher principle of co-operating power forms itself with every society. In wild confusion people oppose each other until according to infallible laws of nature the adverse principles limit each other and a kind of equilibrium and harmony of movement is established."⁴ Herder even developed in his *Ideen* a history of the growth of society in which the starting-point is not the individual but the family. The family is the first step of social organisation. The next step is determined by economic necessities; a nation of hunters, for instance, needs a leader and chooses accordingly that person as king whom they think

¹ This idea also was one of the favourite doctrines of Enlightenment, see Hume's *Essay "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences"*; cf. also Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, edition 1733, vol. i, p. 107.

² *Works*, vol. ix, p. 313.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. xiii, p. 456.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. xiv, p. 227.

most able for this task. But then Herder characteristically discards his historic method. The social phases of the family and of the elected leader are in his opinion natural phases. The next phase, however, that of hereditary government, can in Herder's opinion no longer be regarded as natural. Its only source is violence, above all that violence which is called war, and which Herder detested. He had as a youth experienced the terrors of the Seven Years War and he retained a deep horror of war throughout his life. Thus history seemed to him a sequel of wars and he did not at all share Kant's conviction that even wars have contributed to the progress of mankind. In this sense he wrote the following passage, which shows anything but a true historic method and in which he committed the same mistake with which he reproached others, namely, to criticise history like a schoolmaster: "Not humanity but passions have conquered the earth and have driven its peoples like wild animals together and against one another. If it had pleased Providence to have us governed by higher beings, how different the history of man would have been."¹ This outburst against absolutism is of course more than a psychological reaction from personal experiences. It is the voice of the middle class which had grown weary of having its fate ordained by absolutist princes and their henchmen. Herder's hatred of absolutism was so great that he was even unable to find a justification in history for it.

It was with full determination that he stressed the principle of the original goodness of man and that he turned against Kant who had considered man as an animal which needed a master. He reversed Kant's proposition and said: "The man who needs a master is an animal; as soon as he becomes a human being, he needs a proper master no longer."² Despotism in his opinion is not a product of nature but a degeneration and degradation of the human character.

Herder saw in the rule of the masses as great a danger to humanity as in that of an absolutist monarch, but unfortunately he never explained how he thought the State ought to be

¹ *Ideen*, book ix, ch. iv.

² *Ibid.*

governed. In complete accordance with Humboldt he wrote: "As in all organisations of man, mutual help and security is the chief aim of their union, so also in the State that natural order is the best according to which everyone has the position to which nature has appointed him." Herder, however, does not inform us what this natural order is; we can merely guess that he, like Humboldt, meant to limit the sphere of influence of the State as far as possible.

In contradiction to many of his contemporaries Herder never went back on his early conviction that the French Revolution was the beginning of a new epoch. He divined that the Revolution would arouse the forces which were to create new and permanent political forms. His attitude towards it was determined by the fact that he was an evolutionist and not a revolutionary. He greeted the Revolution as the son of the Enlightenment which he still was, hoping that it would shatter absolutism for ever. But his historic sense was inevitably violated by the revolutionaries who tried to begin a new history with the year one. If he continued to view the Revolution more objectively than many of his contemporaries, the reason is to be found in the fact that he considered it as an historic event with historic causes. In his main work he had called natural history a history of revolutions; it was impossible to overlook that political history also is a history of revolutions.

Herder was the first German nationalist, which secures him a place in the history of political thought in Germany. He was at the same time one of the few men who tried to grasp the universal laws according to which the fate of mankind evolves. This secures him a place in the record of those attempts to comprehend the essence of life which we call philosophy of history.

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CHAPTER VIII

BURKE IN GERMANY: FRIEDRICH GENTZ

A HISTORY of political thought in Germany in this period of transition and ferment would be incomplete if we did not consider the influence which Burke exerted upon German thinkers. This influence can indeed hardly be overestimated. None of the political philosophers, with the sole exception of Rousseau, forced the German thinkers to re-define their political views to such an extent, none opened such fundamentally new aspects as did Burke. In one respect his influence even surpassed that of Rousseau. Rousseau never formed a political school in Germany, whereas Burke became the spiritual father not only of the Romantic and the Historic schools but also of the conservative movement as it developed after the war of liberation. When later conservatives in Germany declared that they were not counter-revolutionaries but stood for that which was contrary to revolution, they borrowed this phrase from de Maistre but they looked up to Burke as their leader.¹ Burke was, in their eyes, not merely one of the opponents of the Revolution, he was the very incarnation of those historic forces which alone could re-establish order in a suffering Europe.

Burke was known in Germany before his famous attack on the Revolution, although his reputation as a thinker of European rank was first established by his *Reflections on the French Revolution*. He had been known as the author of the *Inquiry into the Nature of the Sublime and Beautiful*, which deeply influenced the aesthetic theory of the German Classicists.²

¹ They referred to Burke even in order to justify their aversion to the introduction of the Parliamentary system in Germany by pointing out that Burke described the English Constitution as a peculiarly English growth which it was impossible to transplant.

² Lessing planned to translate this treatise but did not complete the work; the German translation was eventually undertaken by Christian Garve.

His part in English politics, above all his bold defence of the American colonists, and his fight against corruption had been noticed by careful observers of English affairs, but until 1791 his name was known only to a limited circle of intellectuals and it was not the subject of any controversy.

This was fundamentally changed after the publication of his *Reflections*. The widespread interest which this and his subsequent writings on the same subject aroused is illustrated by the number of translations which appeared on the German book market. By 1793 there already existed three complete translations of this book, including the one which had no lesser man than Gentz as author. In 1794 Gentz's translation had to be reprinted, although several pirated editions had already tried to profit from the increasing demand. Even Burke's lesser writings appeared in several translations, a fact which is the more remarkable since interest in political questions was on the whole confined to members of the educated classes, many of whom read Burke in the English original.

The German journals and periodicals which had only recently begun to take any interest in political problems made their readers familiar with Burke's ideas by publishing articles on him and by reviewing his books. Rehberg for instance reviewed the *Reflections* in the *Jenaer Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* and Brandes in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen*, the two most important German periodicals of the time.¹ We must be careful, however, not to overestimate the interest which the public took in this passionate refutation of the Revolution. Few people, curiously enough perhaps not even Burke himself, realised that this book formed a landmark in the history of modern political thought and that it initiated a vigorous train of thought which was to find expression in the historic and organic theory of the State. None of the reviewers accepted Burke's views wholeheartedly, and even those who agreed with him in his denunciation of the Revolution criticised his vehement tirades and his stubborn refusal to recognise the historical causes

¹ Frieda Braune, *Burke in Deutschland*, p. 40 ff.

which had led to the catastrophe. None of the German critics of the Revolution was willing to join in Burke's appeal for a European crusade against the common enemy of civilisation. The friends of the Revolution on the other hand, whose number dwindled as the Terror increased, retorted with abuse and treated Burke as an apostate, a bribed tool of the anti-revolutionary forces, particularly after it became known that he received a pension from the Crown.¹

When we read through the volumes of Archenholz's *Minerva* we find no sign that its editor thought the *Reflections* an epoch-making book. This is so much more surprising since the *Minerva* was an outspokenly political periodical which devoted a great amount of its space to the discussion of French affairs. The reason for this neglect will help us to appraise Burke's place in the development of political thought in Germany. Archenholz had been a staunch defender of the Revolution, in which he saw the fulfilment of the ideals of the Enlightenment, and he turned against it only very reluctantly when the Terror and the overthrow of the Girondists shocked and disgusted him. Yet he never gave up his belief in the humanitarian and cosmopolitan principles which he expected the Revolution to carry into practice. He did not realise that the Revolution was the beginning of a new era, and that when Burke attacked it in reality he was defending the idea of a united European civilisation, an idea which was so dear to the thought of the Enlightenment. It is true that Burke himself did not recognise this significance of the Revolution, at least not at all times. He tended to regard the Revolution as the incarnation of the philosophic spirit of the eighteenth century, and it was in protest against the "metaphysical approach to politics" that he stressed the historical and emotional side of political thought. He was inclined to overrate the responsibility of the philosophers for the outbreak of the Revolution and he grossly misrepre-

¹ For Wieland's opinion of Burke, see *Neuer Deutscher Merkur*, 1790, p. 144. Forster thought Burke's work not even worthy of a translation; Cf. *Works*, vol. vi, pp. 79-85; vol. viii, p. 135 ff.

sented Rousseau, who was in his opinion responsible for all the mischief. But Burke was one of the first to investigate the question of the intellectual origins of the Revolution, a question on which discussion is not yet closed.

Burke attacked in many poignant passages the spirit of the eighteenth century, that century of quibblers and quacks, but there was much of its optimism in his naive exaltation of the British constitution and in his belief in moderate but steady progress. Archenholz, like many friends of the revolutionaries—if only they would remain decently moderate—saw in Burke not the political philosopher, but the political agitator whose anti-revolutionary activity was to be classed with that of the pamphleteer Hoffman in Vienna. We remember Goldsmith's complaint that his friend Burke gave up to party what was due to mankind. How little Burke was considered a political philosopher in his own country is illustrated by the fact to which Lord Morley and Cobban have drawn attention, that he never created a school of political thought in England.¹ In Germany likewise the first generation of his readers, men like Brandes and Rehberg, who were essentially men of the eighteenth century, were not aware of Burke's rôle as the political philosopher who laid the foundations of modern conservatism. They had no understanding for his religious ideas, nor sympathy with the elements of mysticism in him which the Romantics were to emphasise.

In order to understand Burke's significance we have to bear in mind that his attack on Natural Law and the Revolution as the embodiment of it fell on particularly fertile ground. The idea of Natural Law had lost the grip which it had held on European minds for centuries; it had been first the expression of the economic and spiritual unity of the Middle Ages and later the corrective in a time of constitutional and religious strife. The events of the French Revolution had shown unmistakably the results of a purely rational concept of State

¹ See Morley, *Burke*, p. 312; Cobban, *Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century*, p. 273.

and Law. Many people who hitherto had implicit faith in the capacity of philosophers to prescribe laws for the organisation of society began to doubt the validity of philosophic theories when they saw that innocent and decent people were led to the guillotine in the name of philosophy. They began to crave for security and social stability and to resort to the wisdom of their ancestors rather than to the arguments of radical philosophers.

Möser, who on many points came to similar conclusions to Burke, could not make himself heard since he only represented a small German state. Burke, on the other hand, represented one of the most powerful nations and could point to the convincing history of a people for whom most Germans had the greatest admiration. Möser's appeal to take the complex fabric of the social order as it had grown through the centuries more seriously than such ideas as the rights of man seemed old-fashioned and even slightly amusing; Burke's insistence on the wisdom of history was borne out by the political and cultural achievements of England. German political thinkers had learned from Montesquieu to direct their eyes to England and when the French experiment seemed to threaten the whole social order and to shatter the idyllic notions which they had adopted from Rousseau, they turned to England more eagerly than ever. We have noticed this transition in the case of Wieland and his case was typical. German political thought was entirely dependent on French and English ideas, and as soon as the influence of one source declined the other increased in proportion.

Since Burke's influence on political thought in Germany was inextricably connected with his writings on the French Revolution, the question might well be asked whether he substantially contributed to turn public opinion in Germany against the Revolution as he undoubtedly did in England. Did he increase that hostility to the Revolution which had been spreading apace in Germany almost from the moment when the news of the storming of the Bastille excited the world?

One thing can be said at once: Burke had not been the first to attack the principles of the Revolution. When his *Reflections* became known in Germany, that is to say, between 1791 and 1795, the general enthusiasm had cooled down considerably and books like Brandes' *Political Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790), and Rehberg's *Inquiry into the French Revolution* (1793), which was a collection of essays written and published during the preceding years, had stated the case of those who feared and mistrusted the events beyond the Rhine. Neither of those two thinkers can be said to have changed his views on the Revolution under the immediate influence which Burke undoubtedly exerted upon them, especially on Rehberg. Both were hostile to the Revolution from the beginning. Many of their arguments, however, bear Burke's impress, but their instinctive conservatism was established before they took notice of Burke's crusade against the Revolution. On the other hand it is equally certain that Burke's vigorous attack helped to alienate many minds from the cause of the Revolution. The fact that Burke's anti-revolutionary writings were such a success on the German book market does not prove much by itself. Two translations of Paine's book on the *Rights of Man*, for instance, likewise appeared in one year. It only proves that there was a wide interest in the problems of the Revolution, a fact for which no proof is needed. Burke's importance for the development of German political thought does not lie in his rôle as a herald in the struggle against the Revolution. In this respect his work was entirely futile since the result of the Revolution, the transformation of the feudal into the modern state, was inevitable. But that we are able today to judge the Revolution impartially we owe to a large extent to Burke, who taught his generation to think in historical terms although he was unwilling to apply these terms to the Revolution itself.¹ Burke, like Herder in Germany, put an end to that arrogance of the thinkers of the Enlightenment who believed that they had reached the summit

¹ It is in this sense that Tocqueville can be called a disciple of Burke's.

of civilisation and he taught men to be modest and to look back to the past as a storehouse of experience and wisdom. It was his merit to have combined reason and history, which the thinkers of the Enlightenment tended to separate; they used the criterion of reason to criticise history, Burke showed that reason reveals itself in history. Above all, he taught the German thinkers to concern themselves with "the deeper realities of social life."

Burke has rightly been compared with Sir Thomas More, with whom he shared the belief in a common European civilisation which seemed to both to be threatened with disintegration.¹ More fought against the Reformation, Burke battled with the Revolution which at times seemed to him the product of Protestantism. Only Burke's fear that the social order, which had produced men like Garrick and Johnson and in which it was such a joy to live, was threatened with destruction explains the almost hysterical excesses of his attack and his occasional connivance at crude reaction. More sent heretics to the stake for the sake of the holy Church, Burke preached the crusade against the regicide French Government. But there was more in him than fear, there was the belief in the strength of Western civilisation as it had been handed down by countless generations before and it was on this belief that he based his theory of the State as an organism and praised family, Church and corporations as the foundations of society. It was this idea most of all which appealed to the German Romantics who turned to Burke because he had not merely written an anti-revolutionary book but had assigned to the individual a place in the State as a member of an organic whole.

There was only one other political thinker in Europe who opposed to the rational beliefs of the revolutionaries a new faith. But de Maistre lost himself in mystical speculation and in a passionate attempt to re-establish the superiority of the highest mediaeval power in Europe, the Pope. His brilliant defence of Catholicism had a deep effect on the thought of the Romantics,

¹ Chambers, R. W., *Thomas More*, p. 364.

but the influence of Burke, who in spite of his obvious Catholic sympathies remained a faithful Protestant, was deeper and more lasting, particularly in the Protestant north of Germany, where the centre of German politics was to lie. Burke gave expression to the desire of his generation for a stable social order and to the increasing distrust of reason, but he took into account the fact, unrealised by de Maistre, that it was impossible to turn back the wheel of history. Thus he was one of the most important leaders in that powerful revolt against the eighteenth century which remodelled the political shape of Europe.

Friedrich Gentz was the German thinker whose name was most closely connected with that of Burke. He was not only his pupil and translator but also his heir, and after Burke's death he carried on his master's struggle against the Revolution and its liquidator, Napoleon. Gentz began, as we have mentioned, by hailing the Revolution with the same enthusiasm as most of his countrymen. His development from this early enthusiasm to an almost unbounded hatred can be described in a few sentences. In a letter which he wrote to his friend Garve, as late as April 1791, he proudly called himself the friend of the Revolution. In the same year he published an article *On the origin and the highest principles of law* in the *Berliner Monatsschrift* in which he attacked Möser, whom he exposed as a reactionary and he defended the rights of man on the basis of Natural Law¹ A few years later (1793) he published his able translation of the *Reflections*, to which he annexed some political articles of his own. In these articles he revealed himself as a strong supporter of Burke, whom he defended against criticism though he still deemed some mental reservation necessary. By 1798 his views had changed so completely that he wrote of "the hellish tyranny of that cursed government."² As early as 1794 he had already translated Mallet du Pan's violent diatribe against the Revolution.³

¹ *Berliner Monatsschrift*, 1791, i, p. 370 ff.

² Letter of April 26, 1798, *Briefe an Garve*, p. 109.

³ *Considérations sur la nature de la révolution de la France et sur les causes qui en prolonguent la durée*.

There has been much conjecture as to the reasons for Gentz's conversion. One of his friends, Henriette Herz, who know him intimately, spoke of a bribe given by the Austrian Government. This is not very convincing and is entirely unproved, but a more probable explanation is quite simple and less sensational. In his letter to Garve of 19th April 1791, Gentz wrote that he had received Burke's book a few days ago.¹ Although he did not adopt Burke's views unreservedly, the fact remains that he was never to speak a word in favour of the Revolution again, though he still continued to consider it as the most important political event of the age. From April 1791 onwards, we observe how he displayed an increasing hatred of the Revolution and Napoleon and how this hatred grew steadily till with the restoration of the Bourbons the work of the Revolution seemed to be finally destroyed.

It cannot of course be asserted that it was the reading of Burke which turned Gentz from an admirer of the Revolution into its fiercest foe. Such an interpretation would give a dramatic touch to Gentz's life which, it is true, did not lack dramatic detail. In reality Gentz was intellectually prepared to hate the Revolution and all it stood for before he came in contact with Burke's thought. He was essentially a child of the eighteenth century, a disciple of Kant, a rationalist to the core and entirely irreligious, though he played for some time with the idea of becoming a Catholic. As late as 1817 he confessed to Adam Müller that he considered reason the true and only known source of knowledge, a confession which must have deeply shocked his Romantic friend.² When he hailed the Revolution at first with enthusiasm he did so because he believed, to use a phrase of Cobban's, that it was the eighteenth century in action.³ Like many others he was deceived by the terminology of the revolutionaries, which was largely drawn from the storehouse of catchwords of the Enlightenment. He did not

¹ *Briefe*, ed. Wittichen, vol. i, p. 203.

² *Briefwechsel zwischen Gentz und Müller*, p. 243.

³ Cobban, loc. cit., p. 12.

see that the Revolution had a Janus head, that it was not only the eighteenth century in action and even its culmination but at the same time the reaction against it. But he must have had his doubts very soon, though we have no documentary evidence for this. Burke only helped him to become conscious of the danger with which the eighteenth century was threatened. It is characteristic of his true political convictions that until the end of his life his ideal was Europe as it appeared at the eve of the Revolution.¹

It is not surprising that the rationalist Gentz was not attracted by those traits in Burke which were to have such lasting influence on the German Romantics. Burke's religious ideas, his historic outlook, his admiration for the Middle Ages and his distrust of rational systems meant nothing to Gentz. He even thought Burke's fear of atheism was slightly ridiculous and certainly exaggerated. In spite of his close friendship with the Romantic political philosopher Adam Müller, Gentz himself was far from being a Romantic. "Romanticism added to his picture of the world only some new colours but no fundamental lines," as Srbik remarks.² His deep friendship with Müller was based on the fascination which the brilliant personality of Müller exerted on him, not on Müller's ideas, which Gentz often ridiculed. The friends shared an extreme and definitely neurotic sensitiveness. Perhaps Gentz, who was not a systematic thinker, admired his friend who seemed to be able to view the world as a whole. Although Gentz was perhaps the most able interpreter of the ideas of enlightened absolutism at a time when its days were numbered we are entitled to deal with him in a chapter on the Romantic movement. He belonged to none of the schools of thought which were forming themselves and no party can claim him as its member. But he shared his hatred of the Revolution with the Romantics and he acted as the mediator between them and the chief representative of the reaction, Metternich.

¹ Cléry, *les idées politiques de F. de Gentz*, p. 23.

² Metternich, vol. i, p. 345.

It is no accident that the man who became the most famous publicist in Europe and who devoted his life to the restoration of the old order came from Prussia, the country where benevolent absolutism had found its fullest expression. Prussia had been the country in which Enlightenment seemed to have penetrated deepest into the political organisation of society and had produced a type of able and broad-minded officials who tried to adapt the new ideas to Prussian needs. This is the reason why Gentz at the beginning of his career was strongly influenced by the political ideals of the Enlightenment. After his conversion to conservatism he left Prussia for Austria, which seemed to him the stronghold of conservatism and the centre of the resistance against Napoleon.

In his attitude towards the Revolution Gentz is typical of the fears and prejudices of the enlightened minds of eighteenth-century society. His original enthusiasm for the Revolution was youthful and immature playing with fire, an academic radicalism which evaporated when he realised its implications. He seized on Burke whose rhetoric, though he ridiculed it, impressed him, because, as he put it himself, "he who will outcry the storm must speak with a voice of thunder." In this he resembled his great master Metternich, that essentially eighteenth-century statesman who also understood how to make use of Romantic ideas and how to forge with their help the political creed of legitimism.

It has been claimed for Gentz that he was one of the few German publicists who possessed a political programme and a political philosophy.¹ In reality his early political utterances are wholly unoriginal and he remained to the end an eclectic to whom tactics mattered more than political philosophy. He voiced the demand for freedom, but he takes the edge off this dangerous doctrine by maintaining that freedom is limited by definition. In his early pamphlets he distinguished himself in no way from the thinkers of the Enlightenment with whom

¹ Cf. F. v. Gentz, *Staatschriften*, ed. by H. v. Eckardt, p. xi.

he believed in a social contract and in the rights of man. The man who demanded from Frederick William III in an eloquent manifesto the introduction of the freedom of the Press became the closest collaborator of the author of the notorious decrees of Carlsbad. It must be admitted that at least until 1810 Gentz was in favour of mild measures against the Press and he tried to exert a restraining influence on the reactionary Government till he became scared of the growing liberal movement. How far Gentz was from political insight is illustrated by an essay which he published in 1793 in which he dealt with the problem of the morality of revolutions. Here he maintained that only such revolutions could morally be justified as were carried out by the unanimous consent of the people. It might well be argued that Gentz was merely rationalising his inveterate distaste for revolutions. His early political essays, however, reveal another point which is more interesting not as a contribution to political philosophy but as an expression of a prevailing political attitude. In one of these essays Gentz strongly denounces political radicalism altogether. He holds that liberty within limits is a good thing, but too much liberty would destroy the State. "Fanatical worshippers of liberty are nowhere good citizens," thus he formulated his disapproval of radicalism.¹ In this he expressed exactly what most of his contemporaries thought. It was one thing to write academic essays on political philosophy, it was quite another to attempt to put this philosophy into practice. There were only a very few people who were willing to act on their principles like the revolutionary intellectuals in Mainz; most men recoiled from the Revolution when it became too radical for their liking. Some, like the German Classicists, retreated entirely from politics; some, like the Romantics, fled into the past, and some, like Gentz, offered their services to the reactionary forces, which profiting from the fear of a world revolution reshaped Europe after the collapse of Napoleon. The only political idea which Gentz worked out systematically and to which he clung throughout his life was

¹ Burke's *Betrachtungen*, vol. ii, p. 142.

that of the balance of power. This also was essentially a concept of the eighteenth century, based on the belief that reason ought to govern states as it ought to govern individuals. In Gentz's case it was also the application of Montesquieu's principle of the separation of powers.

For the rising nationalism Gentz had no understanding, he was even contemptuous of it. The question of German unity meant to him only the superiority of Austria, and he did his best to prove that the war against Napoleon was not a war of suppressed nations but one conducted by Cabinets in order to restore the balance of power. "The princes and their ministers and generals have done most of it," he wrote in 1818, apparently completely forgetting the enormous sacrifices made by the people.¹ Like Metternich he was afraid that the spirit which animated the masses in the war would lead them to a democratic revolution.²

It was the eighteenth century, its gaiety, its epicureanism, its courtesy, which Gentz was intent to preserve when he used his rich talents in the struggle against the Revolution and Napoleon. We quoted above a passage from Gentz's earlier writings in which he revealed his fear of excesses. The principle of the balance of power was used by him as a device to overcome this fear. Thus Gentz did not adopt Burke's historic point of view for its own sake, but merely as an antidote against the Revolution which disturbed the whole system of balance. There is no doubt that Burke himself became so antagonistic to the Revolution because he realised this point very clearly. Gentz was well aware that he incurred the reproach of being a reactionary. It was in accordance with his liberal past when he took great pains to refute this accusation. He justified his attitude theoretically by pointing out that in a time when disturbance prevails one has to be on the side of those who try to maintain the *status quo*. This is the same attitude which Burke expressed when he described himself as one who, "when the equipoise of the vessel in which he sails may be

¹ *Schriften*, vol. iii, p. 39.

² *Tagebücher*, 1861, p. 277.

endangered by overloading it upon one side, is desirous of carrying the small weight of his reasons to that which may preserve its equipoise.”¹ Gentz formulated this principle of political balance excellently in a letter to Johannes von Müller: “Two principles constitute the moral and intelligible world; one is that of continuous progress, the other that of the limitation of this progress. If the former prevailed, nothing would be firm and lasting on earth and the whole social existence would be a plaything for winds and waves. If the latter prevailed, or even if it gained preponderance, everything would petrify or putrify.”² One might discover Kant’s principle of the social antagonism in this, but in fact it was only the rationalisation typical of a generation tired of the Revolution and hungry for peace. It also furnishes us with an explanation why Gentz turned to Burke whose direct influence on him, as we have seen, was so comparatively small. Gentz’s biographers have not stressed the fact sufficiently that he was a dialectician, that is, a man who is fond of arguing and realises that there are mostly two sides to a question. When he first read Burke, he was attracted by the vigour with which Burke put the case of those who feared the Revolution, and it was only gradually that he himself was seized by this fear.³ Until 1800 he avowed the pacifism of the enlightened thinkers and criticised Burke for his constant exhortation to destroy revolutionary France by fire and sword.

To Gentz, Burke the publicist, the political agitator always mattered more than Burke the political philosopher. He willingly gave up the liberal principles of his early career when he thought that any concessions to radicalism would end in anarchy, for, as he expressed it in a letter to Adam Müller: “I shall welcome any kind of feudalism, if only it frees us

¹ Quoted in Morley, *Burke*, p. 83.

² *Schriften*, ed. Schlesier, vol. iii, p. xliv; cf. also vol. v, p. 319.

³ This is borne out by his letter of April 1791 which we quoted above and in which he wrote that Burke deserved a hearing, that his book gave him greater pleasure than that of a hundred shallow eulogists of the Revolution, but that he disagreed with Burke’s principles and conclusions.

from the rule of the rabble, the sham scholars, the students and particularly the journalists."¹

Gentz's liberal adversaries have always simply described him as a mercenary journalist who works for the cause for which he is paid. It is true that he accepted rich rewards from those who were interested like him in maintaining the old order, but he always made a point of selling himself only to people who held the same political convictions as himself. The greatest publicist of his age was not a political philosopher, but he was a political force of the first rank.

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¹ *Briefwechsel zwischen Gentz und Müller*, p. 244.

CHAPTER IX

NOVALIS AND FRIEDRICH SCHLEGEL

WE have pointed out in the Introduction that it is impossible to understand the development of political thought in Germany at the end of the eighteenth century without taking into account its close connection with general philosophical tendencies and that above all we have to consider the intimate contact between political thought and philosophy of history. Political thought is only one of the branches of intellectual life, and the attitude of the political thinker is deeply influenced by his concept of life in general and by his views on history in particular. This is most clearly shown in the case of Novalis.

Novalis undoubtedly was the most important thinker amongst the early Romantics. In his thought all the different and often contradictory tendencies of the time are blended into a fascinating fabric of ideas. It is true that these ideas constitute a quarry rather than an edifice, but it is in this quarry that we find blocks which were hewn by later thinkers such as Hegel. It is very difficult and perhaps even impossible to reduce the ideas of this "mystic impressionist"¹ to a consistent system, but it is comparatively easy to detect their guiding principles and to discover in them the tendencies which characterised this productive period. The essentially Romantic attitude of Novalis is revealed in the fragmentary character of his work. Apart from some poems, none of his productions is finished, and we find his rich ideas scattered throughout hundreds of short epigrams. The Romantics were indeed not masters of form, they were unwilling or unable to exercise that wise self-restriction which Goethe called the first characteristic of the artist. Their emotional and often morbid desire to seek the absolute, to penetrate into the infinite prevented them from forming their experiences, since no discovery was able to

¹ Lichtenberger, *Novalis*, p. 106.

satisfy them. They were and indeed never could be content with reality, for they were driven by an almost feverish yearning to pierce through reality. Many of them were physically ill or mentally unbalanced; Novalis and Wackenroder died early of consumption, Hölderlin became insane and Kleist committed suicide. These facts are not mentioned in order to show that there was something essentially morbid in their thought, but rather to illustrate the enormous pressure under which they lived and worked. They all belonged to a generation which had to find an answer to the almost superhuman challenge of a social and political system which had been shaken to its foundations. When they grew conscious of their task they found themselves confronted with the gigantic work of the Classicists, which roused them to enthusiasm but which at the same time they tried to outdo in despairing emulation. No wonder that their answer was more a helpless stammer than coherent speech. They were themselves aware of their impotence, but they tried to convince themselves and others that their very impotence was only the expression of their deep insight into the mysteries of life. "He who wants to take fragments of this kind literally," Novalis wrote, "may be an honest man, but he must not pretend to be a poet."¹

The political thought of Novalis was stimulated and influenced chiefly by three factors. The most important, of course, is the French Revolution and the passionate discussion aroused by it, the second is the work of men like Herder and Möser who had taught their age to become historically conscious, and the third is the movement of religious revival which had sprung up in Europe as a reaction from the paganism of the Classicists and the rational criticism of the *philosophes*. In a genuinely Romantic way Novalis combined all these tendencies into his mystic concept of society, which belongs to the sphere of poetry rather than to the sphere of political philosophy, but which was destined to have a far-reaching political influence.

¹ *Works*, Minor edition, vol. ii, p. 143.

Novalis, who was seventeen years old when the Revolution broke out, shared in the general enthusiasm which it aroused. Its emotionalism, its radical impetuosity appealed to him and throughout his life he retained a deep interest in its development and a secret regard for Robespierre. To Novalis, whose attitude was fundamentally determined by aesthetic considerations, the Revolution seemed a gigantic drama, a promethean attempt of mankind to challenge the established order. He revealed a remarkable insight into the causes of the Revolution when he realised that France had been in a state of stagnation and that the king had been "dethroned" long before he was actually deposed. He was not at all willing to identify himself with the interests and privileges of the nobility to which he himself belonged.

Novalis was the only nobleman among the early Romantics, but he did not lead the life considered suitable for a member of that class. He worked for his living in a profession and he thereby showed that he did not want to derive any advantages from his social position. On the other hand he was one of the first to romanticise the nobility by assigning to it a dignity of its own which was based not on privileges but on a special social function. Nobility was in his eyes "the moral faculty" in the State, that is to say, it was only justified if it represented an exceptionally high moral standard. All the Romantics followed Novalis in this romanticising of nobility and some of them like Adam Müller, although they were themselves commoners, became the most ardent supporters of nobility. The nobleman who had been so long the object of hatred and derision became the object of veneration and the exponent of everything that was sound and lasting in society. Nobility to the Romantic was, to use Burke's expression, "a graceful ornament to the civil order and the Corinthian capital of polished society."¹ It is not without interest to note that nobility was romanticised exactly at the moment when it had irrevocably lost its political preponderance and was on the point of becoming

¹ *Reflections on the French Revolution*, p. 135.

a relatively insignificant class. It was in this attitude also that the new historical consciousness revealed itself. The institution of nobility represented the conservative principle of tradition, and the noble families came to be considered as the factors which had guaranteed a steady political development. Particularly after the French Revolution the nobility seemed to many the incarnation of the forces which could stem the tide of anarchy. The Romantics, in glorifying nobility, doubtless performed a most valuable service to that class which had been in danger of being swept away by the rising democratic forces. If it was to survive it was necessary that its existence should be justified afresh, and the best justification was to claim for it a particular social function.

The second factor which determined the political thought of Novalis was his concept of history, his philosophy of history, if we can use so ambitious a term for his inconsistent and obscure attempts to tackle the problems of history. For Novalis, as for all Romantics, history had a new and provocative importance. To penetrate into the past was one way of escaping the present. We noted already the restless dissatisfaction which was the psychological disposition prevailing in the Romantic mind. This dissatisfaction was combined with an ardent desire to view the world as a whole and to conceive it as the emanation of the divine. The Romantic, therefore, not only glorified the past but saw in it the indispensable presupposition to the present. That the present cannot be understood without the past is a legitimate historical principle with which every historian will agree and which has indeed become a commonplace. The Romantics, however, went further. In Novalis's opinion the present does not exist as such, it exists only as the meeting-point between the past and the future, and the goal of the historian is to link up past and future.¹ To the historian of Enlightenment history was a text-book on human virtue or a narrative of anecdotes, to the Romantic it is in the first place an art. The historian must be a poet, that is to say, he must be

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 315.

a man who tries to discover the hidden meaning of historical events and who uses historical data as raw material for his creations. Novalis talks contemptuously of the school historian, of the chronicler who wants to give everything and really gives nothing, since he is the slave of facts and not their master.¹ In his opinion the historical data are the dead material to which only the historian can give life. In this Novalis follows ideas which he had found in Möser, Herder and Burke. Burke's influence on Novalis is invaluable, even if we do not go as far as some scholars who assert that Burke entirely changed Novalis's political opinions, particularly with regard to the French Revolution.² Novalis mentions Burke only once in his works, but we notice his impress throughout. This reference itself is remarkable and throws light on Burke's influence on German thought. "Many anti-revolutionary books have been written for the Revolution," Novalis wrote, "Burke has written a revolutionary book against the Revolution."³ This passage, which reveals the Romantic predilection for epigrams, shows that Novalis took Burke not as an objective historian or a political philosopher but as a passionate politician. In this case also Novalis was impressed by the emotionalism, the impetuosity in Burke, and it was on this account that Burke's ideas on history and religion found entrance into the Romantic movement and through it into subsequent political thought in Germany. Novalis shared Burke's distrust for definitions and principles, although his hostility to rationalism had sources very different from those of the English thinker.⁴ Burke distrusted principles and advocated a policy which was based on tradition and evolution because he treated the history of his country as an organic

¹ *Works*, vol. ii, p. 375.

² Cf. Samuel, *F. v. Hardenbergs poetische Staatsauffassung*, p. 78. In reality, of course, Novalis did not become disappointed with the Revolution because he read Burke, but he admired Burke because the latter expressed to some extent what Novalis himself and many of his generation felt.

³ *Works*, vol. ii, p. 34.

⁴ Cf. Burke's remark: "One sure symptom of an ill-conducted State is the propensity of the people to resort to theories," quoted in L. Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. ii, p. 225.

unity which not even revolution had been able to interrupt. He was convinced that "all the reformations we have hitherto made have proceeded upon the principle of reverence to antiquity."¹ He would have been somewhat surprised if somebody had pointed out to him that the organic concept was to become the backbone of a new theory of State.

Novalis and the Romantics repudiated the principles of the French Revolution not because they were inconsistent with English or French history but because they contradicted their metaphysical convictions. To use an Hegelian term they saw in the Revolution only the antithesis which meant just as little to them as the thesis constituted by the collapsing eighteenth century.² They were concerned with the synthesis, that is to say, with some mystical ideal which was the combination of all the divergent tendencies of the period. They objected to the French revolutionaries because the latter propounded the principles of liberty and equality as an absolute canon, whereas the Romantics considered them only as relatively valid principles. They were particularly opposed to the demand for equality since a society which was based on equality seemed to them very far from their aesthetic and organic ideal. The parts of a work of art and the members of an organism are not equal since they have different functions to fulfil. "All men," thus Novalis expressed it, "are by nature only relatively equal, which in fact is the old inequality, the stronger has also a stronger right. Likewise men are not by nature free but only more or less bound."³ To the Romantic, equality meant mechanisation, whereas his concept of society was an organic one in which the single elements were not merely co-ordinated but subordinated and interconnected.

The third element in Novalis's thought is the religious one. Novalis had grown up in an atmosphere of pietism which had

¹ Loc. cit., p. 29.

² "Thesis and antithesis are the terminal points of a line. The line is the synthesis," *Works*, vol. ii, p. 252.

³ Ibid., vol. ii, p. 146.

been an efficient counter-weight against the rational and dry religiosity of the age and his religious convictions had been formed by his contact with mysticism. Mysticism with its tendency to overcome the boundary between the knowable and the unknowable strongly appealed to the Romantics, and it is possible to trace many of Novalis's views to the thought of men like Jacob Böhme. The strongest power which religion can give to man seemed to Novalis that which is given by faith. Faith was more important than knowledge and more efficient than purely political authority. Novalis headed a section of his political fragments *Faith and Love*, and indeed these emotions or psychological dispositions seemed to him the mainstays of political life. It was in this spirit that he defended superstitions and prejudices. We remember Burke's praise of prejudice "which renders a man's virtue his habit."¹ Burke justifies his defence of prejudice in a remarkable passage which exactly represents the idea of the Romantics: "We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages."² Burke might not have wished to question in this sentence the operation of reason altogether, but he certainly doubted its operation in the individual mind. The Romantics went further and discarded reason entirely as a reliable measure of life.

It has been mentioned that most of the Romantics were Protestants and were therefore, when they were seized by the revivalist current, most apt to turn against that form of religion under which they had grown up. Thus we are confronted with a strong movement of conversion setting in amongst the intellectuals just at a time when Catholicism itself in Germany had come into close contact with the ideas of Enlightenment. The religious attitude of the Romantics was determined by their discovery of an important political phenomenon.

¹ Loc. cit., p. 84.

² Loc. cit., p. 84,

They realised that Protestantism had not only been a religious movement but also a political one, and that it had fundamentally changed the political situation in Europe. Novalis, for instance, openly denounced the princes for having used Protestantism in order to establish their territorial sovereignty. The Romantics were inclined to believe that the Reformation was the first act of the rebellion of the modern European against the mediaeval world, and they drew a line which led straight from the Reformation to the French Revolution.¹

They tended to fix the blame for the unsatisfactory state of affairs in the political and intellectual spheres on to Protestantism. That is why they glorified Catholicism and felt an ardent desire for "those beautiful times when Europe was one Christian country" and was not disunited by religious or national struggles. Thus they came to romanticise the Middle Ages by representing them as an age of religious and social fulfilment and of a rich cultural life. It did not matter that this picture was not compatible with the facts, that instead of unity there was the fierce struggle between Church and State, that the power of the State itself was disintegrating; it served its purpose as an escape from the present and as an ideal.

Novalis was never actually converted to Catholicism, his early death perhaps prevented him from taking this final step, but he drew in glowing colours the picture of Europe in the Middle Ages in a famous essay.² In this essay, which is a poem in prose, Novalis denounced Protestantism and revolution alike as attempts to interrupt the organic development of mankind and as detrimental to the religious spirit. He pronounced judgment on the Enlightenment as the period which loved the light "on account of its mathematical obedience and its impudence." All the Romantics loved the darkness, which

¹ The resemblance between Reformation and Revolution was noticed also by Burke, who as it is known has been accused of Catholic leanings. Cf. *Thoughts on French Affairs*.

² *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, written in 1799, but not published in its entirety until 1826.

seemed to them the symbol of the mysteries and productivity of life. Novalis prophesied a new and general religious revival and demanded that Christianity must again become alive and effective and that "again a visible Church must form itself and disregard territorial boundaries."

This essay, together with the writings of De Maistre, is one of the most important literary documents of the great counter-revolutionary and revivalist movement which set in after the French Revolution and which found expression in such political phenomena as the Holy Alliance. It revealed a new religious, a new political and a new historical attitude. The most lasting of its effects was that which emanated from its ecstatic veneration for the Middle Ages. It is true that this Romantic attitude towards the Middle Ages was historically fully as unjustified as the attitude of the thinkers of the Enlightenment who considered the Middle Ages simply as the ages of cruelty and darkness.¹ This conception nevertheless helped to produce a new historic outlook in as far as it drew the attention of the people to the past. They began to be interested in the growth of their civilisation and to collect the documents of its development.

The Romantics cannot be called nationalists in a modern sense, but they did much to create a national consciousness amongst the people. Novalis was still a cosmopolitan who dreamed of a united Europe under the spiritual leadership of the Catholic Church. He saw in the concept of the nation only an ideal which was identical with that of individuality. He understood by nation a super-individual and on the other hand he defined the individual as a small nation. The Romantics in their philosophic outlook were still individualists, but they expanded the concept of individuality by conceiving society and the State as great individuals, that is to say, as organisms. That Novalis was not a nationalist is shown by the fact that he understood by patriotism not the devotion to a country

¹ Cf. Kant, who thought of the Middle Ages as an inconceivable aberration of the human mind. *Works*, vol. i, p. 64.

but to mankind, a devotion which is influenced and directed by the environment in which man grows up. "Germany" meant to him the capacity to be a citizen of the universal republic of which he dreamed. The question of German unity occurred to him no more than to most of his contemporaries. He was in agreement with Herder when he abhorred the Prussia of Frederick the Second as the prototype of a mechanically governed country. When he romanticised Frederick William III and his beautiful wife as father and mother of their country, he did not think in terms of Prussian or German nationalism.

The political views of Novalis, especially his views on the State, are only the application of his philosophic and historic convictions. The French Revolution had the same effect on Novalis as it had on many of his contemporaries; it stimulated him to occupy himself with political questions, particularly with the relation between the individual and the State. Novalis gave to political problems an answer which was fundamentally different from that given by the French revolutionaries, but he would most probably never have troubled himself with any answer at all had the Revolution not called into question the whole fabric of political ideas of the eighteenth century. This century, indeed, closed with 1789, not only in France but also in all the countries which felt the immediate reverberations of the Revolution.

We mentioned already that the Romantics were the first intellectual school in Germany, not only in the sense that they expressed similar or identical views but also in the sense of a close and personal collaboration. It is therefore not surprising that they turned sociability into one of their most important political principles. Under Fichte's influence they started from the conviction that life meant in the first place *symbiosis*, that to philosophise was to *sym-philosophise*, and that discussion was the most immediate expression of social life. For Novalis, as for all Romantics, society was no longer the abstract concept of the relation of reasonable beings who were fundamentally

isolated, it was only another term for common life in all its forms and expressions. Novalis discovered that the same tendencies and forces which are at work in the single individual also form society; man is essentially a social being and society itself the expression of his social instincts and "the fundamental form of our existence."¹

It has been maintained that the Romantics were fundamentally uninterested in political questions. We believe we have shown that this statement is not true. The Romantics were far too eager to understand the events around them to overlook political problems. They were, on the contrary, the first men in Germany who gave up the indifference of the enlightened thinkers towards the State and thus helped to bridge the gulf which had existed between the State and the individual during the eighteenth century. It is difficult for us to realise the importance of this task. To the modern man the State is such an intrinsic part of his life that apart from a few anarchists who, as Professor Laski remarks, are curiously infrequent, nobody dreams of questioning its necessity.² The man of the eighteenth century, unless he was a political philosopher, did not even know that such a thing as a State existed. For him the centre of political power was the prince whose personal subject he felt himself to be and to whom he turned for help and redress. Amongst the political philosophers in Germany who developed the abstract concept of a state we noticed a marked hostility towards the State which was considered as a necessary evil or a purely legal institution for the protection of some fundamental rights. The political thought of the Enlightenment can indeed be summed up as having centred round the idea that the State ought to disappear as quickly as possible and make room for the free operation of reason. The charge of political indifference is particularly unjustified in the case of Novalis. "The political problem," thus he refuted the charge himself, "is, I suppose, one of the

¹ *Works*, vol. ii, p. 31.

² Laski, *The State in Theory and Practice*, p. 16.

chief problems, if not the highest one, and its solution would have the most important influence on all sciences."¹

Novalis significantly turned against the absolute monarchy of Frederick the Great and the legal theory of Kant and his followers. When he complained that Prussia had been administered like a huge machine he put his finger on the wound from which the Prussian State suffered. The collapse of Prussia which Novalis was not destined to witness was to a large extent due to the fact that the people of Prussia were divorced from the State, that they were subjects and not citizens and that the whole political life had become stagnant. When Novalis demanded a state which was not a machine but an organism he anticipated the demand of the middle classes to participate in political life, and he realised that the problem of the relation between State and individual had to be solved in a way very different from that of the eighteenth century. It is true that Novalis's ideas in this respect have very little theoretical value since they are primarily aesthetical speculations, but they express nevertheless genuinely political tendencies. Novalis complains, for instance, that the State is too little in evidence, and he demands accordingly that the citizens should wear uniform and that there should be people who officially "announce the State." This idea, which we have found in Möser, is an aesthetical metaphor, a Romantic protest against the drabness of eighteenth-century life, but it also shows how strongly Novalis felt that the State ought to be the expression of the political forces of a nation. In fact, this idea seems strikingly modern in an age of political leagues and propaganda ministries.

Novalis turns with remarkable vigour against those thinkers who tried to confine the activity of the State to as narrow a domain as possible. "Our states are almost nothing but legal organisations and defensive institutions," runs the complaint he lodges against thinkers such as Kant and Humboldt. He

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 235. In another remarkable fragment he wrote: "Um Mensch zu werden und zu bleiben, bedarf es eines Staates. Ein Mensch ohne Staat ist ein Wilder. Alle Kultur entspringt aus dem Verhältnisse eines Menschen mit dem Staate." *Works*, edition Miner, vol. ii, p. 272.

agrees with Humboldt that man ought to be a strong and cultured being, but he is convinced that only in a powerful State will there be powerful individuals. In his opinion the end of the State is "to make a man absolutely powerful and not absolutely weak, not the most inert but the most active being."¹ We see indeed that the political standpoint has entirely changed; modern man begins to realise that the tasks with which society is confronted can only be solved if the State expresses and unites all social forces. In this the Romantics only applied the lesson which they had learned from the French Revolution, although they came to very different conclusions. All their Romantic attempts to revive feudal society were futile and they advocated the feudal system only because they were unable to realise that a feudal State was incompatible with their claim that the State should be strong. This incapacity doomed them to political sterility and it was left to men who came after them to outline workable principles of political conservatism. The conservative thinkers of the future did not dream of reintroducing the feudal system since they recognised that it was irrecoverably extinct and that the modern economic development required a strong central Government. Yet there was much which the conservatives had learnt from the Romantics. Like them they based their political philosophy on the idea of a strong State and by identifying State and monarchy they availed themselves of the emotional impetus which the Romantics had given to the concept of the State. There could be no conservatism in the modern sense as long as the right wing of the political front was represented only by the nobility who defended their privileges and prerogatives. Conservatism as a political force required the collaboration of the middle classes and it was the Romantics who secured this collaboration by creating a national ideology and an emotional veneration for monarchy. It has been shown that the concept of Natural Law was of a revolutionary character; the Romantics finally undermined this concept and substituted for it a system of law which had

¹ *Works*, vol. ii, p. 325.

grown historically and organically in a national environment. In Novalis's opinion the fundamental principle which we find working in nature as well as in society is that of "infinite variety,"¹ a principle which is clearly incompatible with the concept of Natural Law.

For Novalis the State is a *makroanthropos*, a being which is analogous with the human organism, and he carries this analogy *ad absurdum*. Thus he considers the guilds as the members of the State and the estates as its capacities. The nobility is, as we mentioned already, its moral faculty, the "estate" of the scientists and scholars its intelligence and the king its will; writings are the thoughts of the State, the public archives its memory.² This indeed is not political theory and might be described as the product of an abstruse and fanciful imagination, but it testifies to the change which had taken place in the relation between individual and State. Novalis discovered the active citizen who was not merely the hypothetical partner in a contract but the member of an organism, and he thus contributed effectively to the development of the concept of a national State. When he demands that the citizen should pay his taxes as he gives presents to his lover he uses a Romantic metaphor in order to stress the fact that the relation between the State and the individual is no longer based on a legal obligation but on devotion. The modern State could achieve its ends only if it came to be considered as a necessary form of human co-operation and not merely as an expedient which men suffer grudgingly for want of something better. The centre of the life of the individual according to Novalis is no longer outside the State, there is no culture except in and through the State.³

Novalis was a staunch believer in monarchy, and it is interesting to note that he relates monarchy to the Catholic hierarchy and democracy to Protestantism.⁴ He realised that the belief in

¹ *Works*, vol. iii, p. 105.

² *Athenäum*, 1798, p. 90.

³ Cf. Fichte: "The perfect citizen lives entirely inside the State; he has no property outside it."

⁴ *Gesellschaft und Staat im Spiegel deutscher Romantik*, p. 185.

democracy presupposes the belief in the equality of the citizens, at least as far as their relation to the law is concerned. He distrusted democracy because he believed that in a democratic State the same spirit of criticism was at work which had been instrumental in bringing about the Reformation. The thinkers of the Enlightenment had tried to justify the institution of monarchy by assigning to the king the rôle of the first servant of the community. Novalis did not share this belief, realising that it was a rationalisation. In his opinion monarchy is based on the belief that a man of higher birth has the divine right to rule. "Monarchy is a genuine system because it creates an absolute centre," thus he formulated his conviction that only a monarchy could be an organic state. The Romantics loved symbols and were therefore in favour of monarchy since the king could be looked upon as the embodiment of political unity. It is well to remember, however, that Novalis understood by monarchy not the absolute State of the eighteenth century but a State in which republican and monarchical elements were mixed. We found this idea in Kant, who meant by it a constitutionally limited monarchy, whereas Novalis did not expound his concept of a mixed Constitution, so that we do not know what exactly he meant by it. The importance of his thought does not lie in his contribution to political philosophy but in the impetus it gave to the formation of a conservative ideology in Germany.

Among the Romantics Friedrich Schlegel was the thinker who remained in closest contact with the ideas of Enlightenment, thus revealing how deeply those ideas had permeated into the thought of the middle classes. Like the Classicists he started by professing a passionate admiration for ancient culture and he was in this first phase of his career convinced that the Greek city state was the highest political organisation which mankind had so far achieved. Even after he had changed his political views he never wholly discarded the concept of Natural Law, though it must be admitted that his ideas on this subject are so obscure that it is very difficult to determine his true stand-

point. When he first expounded his political ideas he was under the influence of Kant and Fichte, and the only difference between his outlook and theirs is his greater radicalism. The fact that one of the founders of the Romantic school and its most fruitful theoretician began his career as a Jacobin and ended it as a reactionary is highly significant. It might be taken as a proof for Schmitt's thesis that the Romantics had no fundamental political views; in reality, it only illustrates the difficult position in which that section of the middle class was to which Schlegel belonged. He was a typical intellectual, that is to say, a man who lived entirely on his work as a journalist, writer and lecturer, and his whole life was a struggle for a secure place in society. It is not a mere biographical coincidence that the lives of most of the Romantics were full of scandal—the brothers Schlegel and Müller married divorced women in circumstances which caused much comment—and that their excessive individualism led them into conflicts with the prevailing moral code. The restlessness and dissatisfaction of their lives accounts to some extent for their desire for peace in the arms of the Church. Society in Germany was not yet willing to tolerate bohemians.

Schlegel hailed the Revolution wholeheartedly and retained his enthusiasm for it longer than most of his fellow Romantics. He called the Revolution, Fichte's philosophy and Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister* the three greatest "tendencies" of the age.¹ This remark reveals the sources of his thought and indicates that he viewed the Revolution as an intellectual force of general importance rather than as an historic event. In this the Romantics were in agreement with Burke who had realised that the Revolution expressed universal or at least European tendencies, that it was not merely a limited rebellion but a "total revolution." The counter-revolutionary movement in Germany could succeed in stemming the tide only if it was based on the latter assumption. If the Revolution was nothing but the result of sedition created by local circumstances, police

¹ *Prosaische Jugendschriften*, vol. ii, p. 236.

action in Germany would be sufficient; if it was merely the outcome of misgovernment, there seemed to be no danger for Germany which many people believed was governed tolerably well. Only if the people realised that the Revolution tried to change the whole social structure of Europe could a counter-movement hope to rally all the forces which were necessary to save Europe from the dangerous conflagration. One of the reasons for the failure of the Coalition War of 1792 was that public opinion was at most luke-warm in its support, since the belief prevailed that the Revolution was an internal French affair.

In Germany it was the Romantics who furnished the intellectual weapons for the battle against the Revolution. They stressed the fact again and again that it was the most important event of modern history. Novalis called it a European disease, Schlegel "the absolute revolution"¹ or "an immense inundation in the political world" and he demanded an intellectual counter-weight against it.²

As late as 1797 Schlegel developed his political system in an essay on republicanism which is one of the most interesting documents of Romantic political thought and is entirely in keeping with the revolutionary ideas, though Schlegel does not refer to the Revolution in it. The essay is a review of Kant's famous treatise on the Perpetual Peace, and Schlegel undertakes in it to outline the principles of a truly republican government. He agrees with Kant that perpetual peace can only be brought about if all states have republican constitutions, and he demands like him a universal republic in the form of a league of nations. It is on the question as to which political institutions constitute republicanism that Schlegel disagrees with Kant. Schlegel draws the conclusion which Kant shuns by pointing out that a republican state must of necessity be democratic, or, as he puts it, the general will must be the basis of all particular political actions.³ This is the reason why

¹ *Jugendschriften*, vol. ii, p. 287.

² *Jugendschriften*, vol. ii, p. 61.

³ *Gesellschaft und Staat*, p. 55 ff.

he objected to the monarchy, since the private will of a royal family cannot be considered as the substitute for the general will.¹ Freedom and equality, he admits, are only ideals, but men must try to approach the ideal even if they will never realise it.

With remarkable insight Schlegel recognised that it was impossible for the general will to be the actual will of all citizens. It is therefore necessary to find a substitute which will at least secure an approximation to it. This substitute is the will of the majority which stands for the general will since it does justice to the greatest possible number. Schlegel protested against Kant's assertion that a democracy is necessarily of a despotic character and proceeds to prove that on the contrary only a democracy is a true state whereas despotism is but a "quasi-state." Schlegel is filled with admiration for England, the State in which, as he wrote, the greatest quantity of freedom and liberty has been realised.² Here we have another example of the fact that England was becoming the political ideal in Germany. Schlegel's predilection for England was a factor which prepared him to listen to Burke's voice a few years later.³

In his lectures, which he delivered at Jena in 1800 and which have only recently become known, he still clung to the republican ideal. Every society must be a republic, because it must be based on the categories of autonomy, equality (isonomy) and harmony.⁴ In a truly Kantian sense he pointed out that law and freedom did not exclude but rather determined each other.

More important than these rather unoriginal ideas are the first intimations of the organic concept of society which we find in these early writings. In agreement with Fichte he stressed the fact that the individual cannot exist isolated and must be considered as the member of a community. Particularly interesting is the definition of the State which he gives in his

¹ *Jugendschriften*, vol. ii, p. 63.

² *Ibid.*, p. 64.

³ He read Burke in 1799.

⁴ *Neue philosophische Schriften*, p. 203.

essay on Republicanism. "The State comprises a coexisting and successive continuity of men, the totality of those whose relation to one another is determined by the same physical influence, for instance all inhabitants of a country or descendants of one tribe."¹ This is the organic theory in embryo.

In spite of these first intimations of an organic concept of the State, the whole tenor of these early writings is essentially radical. Their ideal is a society without classes and privileges based on the original contract and the rights of man. A few years later Schlegel's views had fundamentally changed. In lectures which he delivered in Paris and Cologne during the years 1804 to 1806 he drew a picture of the State which was very different from that in his essay on republicanism.

The State is no longer based on a contract but on the faith of its citizens.² It exerts its power not because its citizens have commissioned the Government to do so but because men believe the ruler to be the representative of God. The republic which he praised so highly now inevitably leads to eternal civil war³ and monarchy is considered "the natural form of the State." The most important idea of these lectures is that the State is no longer considered as a legal institution to secure the rule of law but is assigned the positive task of furthering the morality of its subjects. We remember Burke's famous passage in which he denounces the political theory of the Enlightenment. To Schlegel also the State now "is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection."⁴ The State is the form in which the nation is moulded, and Schlegel clearly developed the modern concept of nationalism when he wrote: "It is more in accordance with nature that mankind is clearly divided into nations than

¹ *Jugendschriften*, vol. ii, p. 61. ² *Philosophische Schriften*, vol. iv, p. 329 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. ii, p. 332. ⁴ *Reflections on the French Revolution*, p. 93.

that several nations are melted into a whole."¹ He ridiculed the principle of natural frontiers and demanded that there should only be national frontiers. A nation is that group of men which is held together by common language and customs.

Schlegel's idea was no longer that of an equalitarian democracy but that of a corporate state, in which the nobility as the caste of the warriors and landowners played the most important part. Thus he entirely discarded the idea of equality, which indeed is incompatible with the organic theory of the State. Influenced by Fichte, Schlegel professed a strong distrust of trade, which he was inclined to look upon as immoral, and he demanded that the State should monopolise foreign trade and control home trade.² Here we meet that distrust of capitalism which is one of the characteristics of Romantic thought and which shows that the Romantics did not wish to be leaders of the middle class or advocates of their economic interests. Schlegel still maintained his cosmopolitan point of departure, but for a world republic he now constituted the idea of the Papacy as the "universal central point" for all in the spiritual sphere. With Schlegel the German Romantics had joined the counter-revolutionary phalanx which was formed by Burke in England and De Maistre and Bonald in France.³

We need not go into the details of this political theory, according to which the State has again become a divine institution, a work, to use the expression of De Maistre, on which there is the divine seal⁴ and the mediaeval feudal society the pattern for a thorough reorganisation of the prevailing political order. The highest social organisation is the Catholic Church beside which the State is of inferior significance. What concerns us more are the reasons for this entire change from revolution

¹ *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Windischmann, vol. ii, p. 358; vol. iv, p. 357 ff., cf. also the following passage: "Jeder Staat ist ein selbständige für sich bestehende Individuum, ist unbedingt sein eigener Herr, hat seinen eigentümlichen Charakter, und regiert sich nach eigentümlichen Gesetzen, Sitten und Gebräuchen." Loc. cit., vol. iv, p. 382.

² Windischmann, vol. iv, p. 326 ff.

³ De Maistre's *Considérations sur la France* appeared in 1797, Bonald's *Legislation Primitive* in 1802.

⁴ *Considérations*, p. 103.

to reaction. When Schlegel developed these ideas he had been living in Paris for several years in very precarious circumstances. He had watched with interest and fear the career of Napoleon and recognised the danger which he might bring to Germany. He had thus had a very impressive lesson that revolution ended in dictatorship.

When he returned to Germany he came into contact in Cologne with Catholics, who formed the majority in that part of Germany, and his restless and dissatisfied mind was strongly impressed by the peace which religion seemed to bestow on these people. The Catholic Church in Germany began to regain ground after a long period of decline. In the latter part of the eighteenth century it had been fashionable among the intellectuals to ridicule Catholic dogma, and Catholic theology under the influence of the Enlightenment had degenerated into a shallow moral philosophy.¹ A man like Herder could write that the Church of Rome resembled an old ruin in which new life could enter no more. We have shown in the first chapter how revolutionary and rational theories penetrated even into Catholic universities. The reaction was inevitable as soon as the belief in reason began to waver, and the first twenty years of the new century witnessed a strong revivalist movement which was initiated by the sensational conversion of the Count of Stolberg in 1800. The Romantics felt particularly attracted by the Catholic Church whose ritual appeals so much more to the emotional and aesthetic mind. The Catholic Church, moreover, had been the universal Church of the Middle Ages, and thus it happened that many of these men who venerated feudal society turned towards Catholicism.

There is a temptation to explain the wholesale conversion of the Romantics in psychological terms as a reaction from their extravagant and even licentious life. In reality the revivalist movement was more than a mere reaction of a group of repenting sinners, it was the expression of the desire of a whole generation for peace and order, and it was by no means confined to Catholics or to Romantics.

¹ Cf. Goyau, *L'Allemagne religieuse*, vol. i, p. 161.

Schlegel's later career in Vienna is not without tragic features. He degenerated into a fashionable lecturer for society ladies, whose admiration had to serve as a recompense for his lack of influence, and his political views became decidedly obscurantist. He now talked of the Revolution as a "democratic swindle,"¹ and the sovereign became the deputy of divine justice who is responsible only to God.² The basis of political allegiance is not reason but uncritical devotion to the ruler. A monarchy which is based on a contract has, in his opinion, ceased to be a monarchy since the concept of a contract is incompatible with the idea of a Christian state of which the basis is not agreement but subjection to the will of God.³

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¹ *Works*, vol. ii, p. 216. ² *Ibid.*, vol. xii, p. 193. ³ *Ibid.*, vol. xiii, p. 242.

⁴ All the references in the text are to this edition unless otherwise noted.

CHAPTER X

THE ORGANIC THEORY

SCHELLING was the most Romantic among the German philosophers and certainly was the most mystic and speculative thinker among the German Idealists. He was the founder of the school of the so-called philosophy of nature, which was an attempt to reconcile the dualism between Nature (the realm of necessity) and Morality (the realm of freedom) and was an interpretation of the world as an organic whole. We can content ourselves in this connection with saying that his political system was more a poetical than a philosophical work and thus illustrated the tendency of the Romantics to approach philosophy as poets and poetry as philosophers.¹ In their efforts to oppose to the despised philosophy of the Enlightenment a positive principle, the Romantics discovered the category of the aesthetic or rather developed this category which they had found in the thought of the Classicists, especially in that of Schiller. Their chief concept was no longer the good but the beautiful and their chief aim was to discover the beautiful in the world. Poetry was for this generation, as Treitschke once put it, the ocean into which all rivers flowed. If Novalis, for instance, confessed his preference for the Prussian monarchy of Frederick William III, he was attracted by the beauty of the queen and by the idyll of royal family life, not by the idea of a strong Prussian monarchy.

This aestheticism seems futile and even ridiculous, but in fact it led to some important discoveries. The Romantics were like children who while playing suddenly discover a hidden treasure. Their dislike of rationalism and their discontent with the present led them to occupy themselves with the riches

¹ There are, of course, subtle differences between the organic concepts of Schelling and the other Romantics, but these need not concern us here. Cf. Mehlis, *Schellings Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 27.

of the past, and it was under their influence that Germany began to collect her cultural documents and treasures of art. Schelling's attempt to depict reality as a divine work of art led him to the rediscovery of the organic concept. In his opinion the organism was the highest form of the "spirit" in nature, that is to say, an organism was at the same time natural and intellectual in so far as it belonged to the realm of nature and to the realm of morality. "The same intellectual substance," Schelling wrote, "which represents itself in nature as a biological organism creates in the sphere of the human mind and in history an adequate form in the organism of the State."¹ By viewing life as a work of art in which divine reason revealed itself, Schelling came to consider the State as an organisation in which each member was just as indispensable a part of the whole as any part in a work of art. Schelling, like most of his contemporaries and some of his fellow Romantics, had begun by describing the State as a mechanism and as a mere means to an end, but he soon proceeded to a mystical concept according to which "the constitution of the State was the image of the constitution of the realm of ideas." This is already very near to Hegel's concept of the State and means simply that the State has become a divine and absolute institution, the existence of which is in no way dependent on the will of its individual members. The State is according to this view not a means to the realisation of an end but an end in itself. "Art, religion and science find their expression in the State and nowhere else; science by way of legislation, religion through public morality and the arts through the creative spirits which make life beautiful."² The part which is played in Plato's philosophy by the concept of justice is played in Schelling's thought by that of beauty. One of the essential features of beauty is its intrinsic unity, and the State as an organism is the highest possible expression of unity.

It is unnecessary for us to dwell on Schelling's other political

¹ Holstein, *Staatsphilosophie*, p. 132.

² Mehlis, *Schelling's Geschichtsphilosophie*, p. 89.

ideas which are scattered throughout his works, since they are not at all original or even significant. His chief influence lay in the fact that he gave to the Romantic thinkers the philosophical weapons with which to fight the philosophy of the Enlightenment and to challenge the concept of Natural Law.

In his youth Schelling had published an essay on Natural Law which was a dry and unoriginal treatise, but which was at least an attempt to take up the challenge which the French Revolution had offered and to tackle political problems. Afterwards Schelling remained silent as far as political problems are concerned, although he lived through a period of great political struggles and changes. He clung to his conviction that the State was a necessary institution, "the foundation of the whole of human life and of all future development, the basic condition which must be preserved at all costs," but he came to the reactionary conclusion that constitutions could not be changed. He professed his distrust of republics and saw his political ideal in an absolute monarchy. If we compare those ideas with eighteenth-century ideals we discover that the essence of absolutism, the complete subjection of the individual, had remained unaltered, while the concept of the prince was replaced by that of the State viewed under an organic metaphor.

The fact that this famous Romantic philosopher was so little concerned with political problems and had nothing to say on the political issues of his time is a further instance of the political indifference of even the most important representatives of the German middle classes. Schelling's aesthetic State was certainly not capable of solving the problems with which mankind was faced, and the future would show that the harmony of beauty was not to be found among the characteristics of the modern State. Schelling was the characteristic spokesman of a group of talented intellectuals who segregated themselves from political life and indulged in metaphysical speculations. We are not surprised to find that Schelling's device for the

¹ Baxa, loc. cit., p. 268.

philosopher was: *Odi profanum vulgus*.¹ There was much intellectual haughtiness in the Romantic attitude, the haughtiness of the intellectual who feels himself above reality and refuses to be dragged into the struggle of the workaday world because he believes that his own interests are not involved.

The organic concept, important though it was for his concept of the world, remained a merely accidental part in Schelling's political thought, and he certainly drew from it no conclusions which might have shed new light on the political problems with which his generation was confronted.² The true propagator of the idea of the State as an organism was another member of the Romantic movement, Friedrich Schleiermacher, whose thought expressed the fundamental change in the general attitude towards the State so well. All the thinkers with whom we have dealt so far were concerned in the first place with the dignity of the individual as a free moral subject who gives laws unto himself. This was the philosophic expression of the growing self-consciousness and self-confidence of the middle classes in the cultural sphere. Kant's categorical imperative, Fichte's Ego, Humboldt's concept of the cultured individual, Schiller's aestheticism, were different forms of the protest against the suppression of the individual under absolutism and rationalism. In these thinkers who still stood under the spell of the Enlightenment, this movement of protest led to an unbridled individualism and a hostility towards the State which found its fullest expression in Humboldt and the young Fichte.

It became obvious very soon that this negative attitude towards the State was untenable since it was in contrast to the economic and social development. The French Revolution and its heir Napoleon taught the nations that the State which abolished the last remnants of feudalism and relied on its national forces developed a particular strength which the states, which still retained the *ancien régime*, could not withstand. The revolutionary onslaught on Germany brought home to

¹ *Vorlesungen über die Methode des akademischen Studiums*, p. 63.

² Cf. Holstein, *die Staatsphilosophie Schleiermachers*, p. 110.

the people the fact that they were inextricably bound up with the fate of the State. The citizens who so long had been the tool of government began to realise that they were an active part of the political life and to become conscious of their nationality. This movement grew particularly strong after the war of liberation when the people who had done the fighting demanded some tangible reward for their sacrifices. There were, of course, many reasons for the ultimate failure of this movement, but the most important was the fact that the absolutist forces of the eighteenth century were still very strong and were even reinforced by the horror with which the French Revolution had inspired European society.

It is beyond question that the old relation between State and individual, according to which the former was treated as a mere means to the furtherance of individual welfare and the latter as a mere tool of the Government, could no longer be maintained. The self-confidence of the middle classes, especially in the progressive and economically advanced western parts, had become too strong and their intellectual leaders had stressed the dignity of man too firmly to admit of a theoretical construction which treated man as a minor. The thinkers therefore sought for a new stabilisation of the political relation between the individual and the State. The concept which served this purpose best was the concept of the State as an organism. The construction of the eighteenth century was satisfactory at a time when the princes administered their small states as machines, interfering with every detail of the life of the individual and leaving very little active collaboration to the citizens. The mechanical concept of the State was the political theory fitting to the age of mercantilism. We must bear in mind that in the enlightened monarchies the subject, except perhaps in times of war, did not concern himself with state affairs. He was not called upon to perform political duties, even the wars were conducted by mercenaries, and his newspapers, as far as they existed, did not inform him about politics. This changed completely when general conscription was introduced

after the French example and political journalism began to develop. The transition from the mercantilist to the modern State found expression in the organic concept according to which the State is considered either as a living organism with characteristics corresponding to those of a human body or as an organisation to which human characteristics can be applied at least by way of analogy. This concept is the expression of a keen desire for political unity and presupposes a strong sense of identity between the citizen and the Government. It is therefore to be found in times when these conditions prevail as in the Greek city state, whereas it disappears under despotic rule.¹

During the last quarter of the eighteenth century the natural sciences had made conspicuous progress and people grew increasingly interested in such sciences as physics, biology and medicine. All the Romantics dabbled in science and their works are full of often half-digested technical terms chiefly taken from chemistry and medicine. This interest greatly helped to elaborate the organic concept which was an application of a scientific principle to the sphere of politics.

It has been repeatedly remarked that the belief in the organic concept of the State was nowhere stronger than in nineteenth-century Germany. The reason for this was that the alienation of the individual and the State and the subsequent desire for a rapprochement was nowhere greater than in Germany. The organic theory which considered the State as a higher form of life comprising and absorbing the life of the individual seemed an excellent safeguard against such alienation and a fitting expression for the desire for national unity. Moreover, it satisfied the metaphysical inclinations of the German thinkers who had been schooled in the spirit of the Idealists and who now saw the dignity of the individual secured since he was the part of a greater whole.

¹ Cf. Krieken, *Organische Staatstheorien*, p. 12. That the organic concept did not disappear completely from mediaeval political thought is due to the overwhelming influence of Aristotle.

We are not concerned here with criticism of the organic concept as an explanation of political phenomena. Its theoretical value, as has often been pointed out, is very doubtful, but its importance as a political principle is nevertheless unquestionable. Though some of its adherents have employed it to justify democracy, most advocates of the organic concept have held conservative views, and for a long time it seemed as if it was the backbone of the philosophy of conservatism in Germany. It became one of the chief weapons in the struggle against the principles of the Revolution, since the very notion of an organism excludes the possibility of revolutionary change and even the existence of irreconcilable contrasts in the body politic; for organisms do not change violently, their life is determined by the law of slow evolution. Later thinkers used the analogy between the human being and the State as justification for the monarchy in which the monarch plays the same part as the will in the human organism. In Schleiermacher's thought the organic concept allied itself with the national idea and thus all the strength which could be derived from the concept of an organic state was transferred to the national movement. This development in Schleiermacher's thought was deeply influenced by the political fate of his country in its struggle against French nationalism.

Another element strongly determined Schleiermacher's thought. He was a Protestant parson and came from a deeply religious family whose thought had been shaped by Luther and other German Protestants. That Protestantism in Germany at the turn of the century profited from a revivalist movement which had stimulated Catholicism was to a large extent due to Schleiermacher, who was one of the fathers of modern Protestant theology. More important in this context is that he was also the founder of what may be called political Protestantism. This particular blend of religious and political ideas had a considerable influence on the subsequent development and on the political thought of the German middle classes. During the eighteenth century sermons had been an important

expression and a reliable indicator of the political ideas of the people, and they serve the student as a valuable source for the history of political thought. During the nineteenth century the parson gradually lost his political influence in proportion as the population grew and newspapers increased their circulation, but for the period here in question he was still of the greatest importance.

In order to understand Schleiermacher's political ideas and the political attitude of the Protestant majority of the German people we must give here a brief survey of the history of Protestant political thought in Germany.¹ It is one of the greatest merits of that school of German sociologists whose most important members were Ernst Troeltsch and Max Weber to have brought to light the close connection between religious and political thought.² We owe to Troeltsch an admirable study of the importance of religious thought for the development of the concept of the modern State. In this study Troeltsch very pertinently refutes the often repeated assertion that Protestantism created the modern State and he proceeds to appraise its real significance. Luther's great contribution to political thought was his rehabilitation of the State. Luther insisted on the spiritual superiority of the Church, but he saw in the State a device of God to make religious life possible and thus appeased the conscience of the Christian by pointing out that to be in the service of the State was to be in the service of God.³ Thus Protestantism contributed to the development of the modern absolute State; on the other hand it must be borne in mind that in Luther's opinion the State was only a *pis aller* which would not be necessary if the world were inhabited entirely by Christians. Thus far Protestantism contributed to the distrust felt by the middle classes for the State.

In another respect Luther's influence on German political

¹ Cf. Troeltsch, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen*, p. 560 ff.

² Cf. Weber, *Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*.

³ Luther never uses the term State, he speaks invariably of authority (*Obrigkeit*).

thought seems to us of greater importance than Troeltsch is willing to acknowledge. No other political principle was more firmly rooted in Luther's thought, than that of absolute obedience to authority.¹ This doctrine certainly was not introduced by Luther into German political thought but it derived its validity for modern Germany from the specifically Protestant conception of authority. If authority is of divine origin, if the prince is the deputy of God, obedience becomes not only a political but a religious duty. Protestant writers have often claimed for Protestantism that it paved the way for modern liberalism by liberating the conscience of the individual; Catholic writers on the other hand have denounced it as the seed-bed of anarchy.² Both views are far from the truth. Protestantism as formulated by Luther and his followers was an important force in the revival of the theocratic concept of the State,³ and Luther by denying the people any right to resist the ruler, even to criticise him, did much to stabilise the absolute power. He even went so far as to advise the victims of despotism to emigrate if they could not combine their religious and political duties, since it was against the principle of Christianity to take the law into one's own hands. It is obvious that a political philosophy which was centred round the concept of absolute subjection to the ruler did little to educate the subjects to profitable criticism and it is very difficult to find even the slightest trace of liberalism in it.

Luther has been criticised by liberal writers for his attitude towards the rioting peasants. This attitude has been described as a betrayal of his better judgment and one scholar has called it "an ineffaceable stain on Luther which no extenuating

¹ Luther advocates complete subjection under the will of the ruler, though he is under no illusion as to the worth of many princes. "From the beginning of the world," he writes in his drastic way, "an intelligent prince has been a rare bird, and a pious one a still rarer. They are usually the greatest fools or the worst scoundrels on earth." Weimar ed., ii, p. 267.

² "The great enemy of Europe—the father of anarchy is Protestantism; it is born rebel, and insurrection is its natural state." De Maistre, *Réflexions sur le Protestantisme dans ses rapports avec la souveraineté*.

³ Gierke, *Althusius*, p. 64.

circumstances can wipe out."¹ In reality there was no betrayal or inconsistency in Luther's attitude which, on the contrary, was only the practical application of his political convictions. The scholars who raise such reproaches try to turn Luther into an advocate of tolerance, a forerunner of liberalism, whereas all these modern ideas were entirely alien to him.² The service which Luther rendered to mankind by liberating it from the fetters of mediaeval thought is inestimable, but in the sphere of practical politics he was a conservative if not a reactionary, and was very clearly on the side of the ruling classes. He realised that the supremacy of the Pope and of the Catholic Emperor could be overthrown only by the German princes and he knew that at least some of them would embrace Protestantism, not because they thought it was theologically right but because it provided a means of stabilising their political power. By Protestantism we understand the Lutheran variety, Calvinism and the sectarian movement in the Anglo-Saxon countries led to completely different results. They developed, as Troeltsch shows us, the concept of resistance against the ruler who violates his duties and thus their Protestantism indeed led to democratic and revolutionary consequences.³

In the centuries which passed between Luther's death and the French Revolution the outstanding representatives of Protestantism in Germany developed further the doctrine of obedience to the established powers. Paul Gerhard, an eminent theologian, taught that family, State and Church were not created by man but ordained by God and that absolute subjection to them was accordingly only obedience to God. At the same time those thinkers who realised that a dangerous tension existed between government and people strove to bring home to the princes that they were only the deputies of God and had therefore moral though not political duties towards their subjects. This was the spirit in which Ludwig

¹ Lindsay, *Luther and the German Reformation*, p. 186.

² Waring, *Political Theory of Martin Luther*, p. 278 ff.

³ Cf. Troeltsch, *Die Bedeutung des Protestantismus für die Entstehung der modernen Welt*.

von Seckendorf's *Deutscher Fürstenstaat* (1655) was written. The fundamental idea of benevolent despotism that it was the moral duty of the prince to work for the happiness of his subjects was thus a development of Protestant principles even if Catholic rulers like Joseph II applied them.

The accusation of the Romantics that there was a close connection between Protestantism and revolution cannot be maintained, at least as far as German Protestantism is concerned. The political ideal of the German Protestant was and remained that of a patriarchal state, and not a single writer who had adopted Luther's doctrine has made demands in the slightest degree revolutionary. Luther had gone to some pains to prove that serfdom was compatible with the Holy Scripture and none of his followers had put forward views which might shatter important social institutions. Luther taught the German Protestants a lesson which was to bear fruit a hundredfold. He taught them to respect power as such as a manifestation of God's will.¹ This not only led to "political quietism" but also paved the way for Hegel's concept of the State.

When the young Schleiermacher began to concern himself with political questions he was under the influence of these Protestant ideas as they had been developed in the age of Enlightenment, but at the same time the French Revolution had made an indelible impression on his mind. Even in his earliest period he differed fundamentally, in one respect, from most of his contemporaries: he was deeply interested in politics and he tried from the beginning, as he later formulated it, "to teach his generation Christianity and the State." Like many idealist thinkers of the period he was shocked by the egoism which seemed to be the chief driving force of society at the end of the eighteenth century. He despised the general desire for personal happiness and set out to establish human relations, above all in the political sphere, on a new ethical basis. Although he had viewed the Revolution at first with sympathy and expectation he was very soon filled with deep

¹ Cf. Luther, Weimar edition, vol. i, pp. 115-118.

anxiety lest it might overthrow the whole social order and lead to anarchy. It was in opposition to the French ideology that he used Protestant ideas to remind his listeners of their duties towards the State. He again stressed the divine origin of authority and praised religion for its capacity to keep men to their political duties. He tried above all to fill his audience with trust in the wisdom of their rulers, which seemed to him to be the best guarantee against revolution. It is interesting to note how he still used eudaemonic arguments although he was already convinced that the desire for the happiness of one's self or of others was a dangerous and misleading principle. In order to remind his hearers of their duties towards the State he enumerated with glowing eloquence all the advantages which life in the State had for them. This is significant since it shows that in order to interest these burghers in the State even a man like Schleiermacher had to use arguments to which they were wont to listen and which appealed to their egoism. At the same time he felt Kant's influence and followed his teachings in praising the State as the only organisation which could ensure the rule of law. But here again the Protestant idea of the unquestioned superiority of authority came to the fore when Schleiermacher asserted that only the ruler could decide which laws were wholesome for the community and also when he maintained Luther's differentiation between State and religion by pointing out that the State claims only one part of the personality whereas religion claims the whole. Thus the political ideas of Schleiermacher in his early period illustrate the variety of intellectual influences under which this generation stood in its effort to find a new approach to the fundamental questions of politics.

It has been said that Schleiermacher's adoption of the organic concept and of the national ideology was a result of, or rather reaction from, the Prussian collapse in the Napoleonic wars. The authors of this theory forget that the political reorientation of Germany at the beginning of the nineteenth century had more than one cause. We have traced the develop-

ment of the national and organic concepts in thinkers such as Möser and Herder, who worked long before Napoleon's impressive figure appeared on the European stage. No doubt the stimulating experiences of the wars of liberation increased the national tendencies and strengthened the ties which bound the individual to the State, but these tendencies were in existence before men like Schleiermacher and Fichte gave definite expression to them. It was the time of the political awakening of the middle classes from the slumber from which the French Revolution had already disturbed them.

Schleiermacher's attitude was profoundly modified by contact with the ideas of the Romantics. He at once adopted their principle of individuality and realised that it could be used to re-establish the relation between individual and State and to overcome the consequences "of the wretched isolation." The individualist philosopher of the eighteenth century had seen in the individual only an abstract unit of society and he had stressed those qualities which are common to all men rather than those which are particularly his own. This mechanical individualism found expression in a political theory according to which the State was a machine. Even Kant placed at the beginning of his construction of the State the isolated individual stripped of all those characteristics which in fact constitute individuality. Schleiermacher, like all the Romantics, strongly denounced those thinkers who conceived the State as an artifice or a makeshift to secure the greatest measure of happiness. In a typically Romantic way he viewed the State under the metaphor of a work of art. This led him to the conviction that individual and community are dependent on and mutually determined by one another. To give oneself to the community becomes an ethical duty and the individual feels that life in the community enhances his own strength. The State is not a creation of men, it is an organic part of the process of culture and presupposes a strong desire for unity among its members. Thus Schleiermacher came to refute the principle of the social contract and we have to admit that his criticism of it, as far

as it goes, is wholly sound. He pointed out that a social contract can only be conceived if the people who conclude it already have a strong consciousness of their membership of a social community—in other words the social contract presupposes the State, the origin of which it purports to explain. In contradiction to this unhistoric concept Schleiermacher expounded a theory of the development of the State which tried to do justice to the historic facts. In his opinion the State emerges from the dawn of history when men first become conscious that they belong to one another, or in other words when they grow into an organism. Schleiermacher accordingly discovered the close relation between nation and State.

The concept of nationality was the application of the principle of individuality to the political sphere. The Romantic felt himself compelled to view all phenomena which he encountered as forms of life and it was only a consistent development of his ideas when he conceived social phenomena as living organisms. A nation was a group of men grown into an organisation with distinct characteristics which allow us to treat it as a great individual. Here we see clearly the close connection between the organic and the national concept. The organic concept of the State was used to explain the fact that a group of men who speak the same language, have the same historic experiences and develop a particular civilisation tend to organise themselves politically. As each organism is something individual, different and distinguishable from other organisms, so the national State is something unique and not only a part in a cosmopolitan republic. From here the path led directly to the ideas of the Historic School.

It is obvious that this theory of the State was fundamentally different from that of the Enlightenment or that of Kant or of Fichte in his revolutionary period. Schleiermacher realised that men would feel a strong attachment to the State only if they were aware that it was the expression of the particular political forces in the midst of which they lived. The deep satisfaction which we feel in the face of a work of art is partly

due to the fact that we regard it as the unique and perhaps unrepeatable expression of the artist's genius. So every nation is a unique creation of God and "only he who is convinced of the mission of his own people knows the particular mission of others."¹ In this we recognise the voice of Herder who had first reconciled the cosmopolitan idea of the Enlightenment with the national idea. This young nationalism was not aggressive, its adherents magnanimously assigned a special rôle to each nation. The great struggle for the markets of the world had not yet begun in Germany and so there was no sign of the violent imperialism of the future which was to find its strongest supporters among the middle classes. Even Hegel's glorification of the Prussian military state as the embodiment of the world spirit was very far from Schleiermacher's mind.

Schleiermacher naturally tried to discover the criterion of nationality. In this respect he stressed in the first place the importance of the land on which the members of the community grow up and thus he occasionally defined the State as the relation of man to the soil. Another factor of the utmost importance for the creation of a national organism was that of language. The language seemed to him one of the most fundamental expressions of that community spirit without which no state can exist. Schleiermacher was not aware of the fact that modern nation states (e.g. Switzerland) can exist even if they are composed of different racial groups with different languages. Even the first traces of the modern racial theory can be discovered in his thought. Schleiermacher turned against Kant who, like most of the thinkers of the Enlightenment, understood by race merely the descendants of one originally alike species who had become differentiated under the influence of climatic and cultural conditions. In Schleiermacher's opinion race is a constant natural type and he draws from this the conclusion that nations form themselves only if they are racially homogeneous.

¹ Holstein, loc. cit., p. 92.

The political theory of the Enlightenment was finally overthrown by Schleiermacher's concept of the State as an organism into which the nation had developed in the course of history. One can hardly think of a greater contrast than that between Schleiermacher's and Humboldt's concepts of the State. Schleiermacher theoretically ascribed to the State the task of educating its citizens, a task which Humboldt had deprecated so strongly in his political essay on the limits of the State. Schleiermacher knew that the community spirit which was the *élan vital* of the State could only develop if the citizens were raised from the degrading status of illiteracy.¹ Thus he urged that the State should organise education on a magnanimous scale and he prepared the way for the reforms of the Stein-Hardenberg administration. This new theory was the fitting expression of the political forces of a nation which was about to engage in a mortal struggle for its existence, and at the same time it clearly indicated that the time had passed when the State was ruled by a small group of princes and bureaucrats in the interests of landed aristocracy and without the participation of the masses. Schleiermacher, though he did not know it, was one of the spokesmen of the middle classes who began to feel themselves as part of the political organisation.

Schleiermacher, however, was not a democrat, nor can he even be called a liberal, though he raised certain liberal demands such as that for freedom of the Press and of property. One might have expected that his theory of the State in which the citizens were members of an organism would have led him to the conclusion that the individuals should have some share in the government. Instead he insisted on the absolute superiority of authority, which seemed to him, as to Luther, the incarnation of God's will, and he remained throughout

¹ How necessary it was to advocate general education is illustrated by a booklet on *The Enlightenment of the People*, by a parson, L. L. Hahnzog, which appeared in 1803. In this treatise the author deemed it necessary to prove that the education of the peasants would not impair their readiness to obey authority.

his life a staunch monarchist. He demanded that the modern State should be based on mutual love and esteem between the prince and his subjects and he comforted himself, as did many thinkers after him, with the thought that a true spirit of community existed which secured a satisfactory relation between ruler and citizen. When, after the war of liberation, the Government did not keep its promise to grant a Constitution, Schleiermacher became deeply disappointed and disillusioned, but it is characteristic of him that he expected salvation from the nobility and not from the middle class.¹ It was more than the irony of fate that this thinker was one of the first to suffer from the reaction after the war of liberation and was annoyed and almost persecuted by the officials of a state for which he had done so much.

In 1808 Friedrich Gentz advised his friend, Adam Müller, to write a book in defence of the nobility and he pointed out that he would thereby make his fortune.² This casual remark furnishes the historian of the political thought of this period with an important key. It would of course be erroneous to deduce from this frank utterance that Müller's subsequent campaign for the prerogatives of the nobility was entirely dictated by mercenary motives, but it throws light on one side of the problem which most students tend to overlook. When Gentz urged his friend to embrace the cause of the nobility he knew perfectly well that such activity might easily prove very remunerative. The nobility in Germany, scared by the events in France, and afraid of losing their long established preponderance, were eagerly looking around for skilful defenders of their own interests. Since they themselves lacked pens of sufficient subtlety and vigour they were quite willing to welcome counsel from that class which usually attacked their position,

¹ Cf. the interesting letter of February 27, 1816, to the Count Alexander von Dohna. With regard to his own class Schleiermacher wrote: "Had the liberty of the Press been granted, we too would be able to do something, now we are completely fettered and have to be most passive unless we wish to be revolutionaries." Schleiermacher, *Briefe an die Grafen zu Dohna*, p. 56.

² *Briefwechsel zwischen F. Gentz und A. Müller*, p. 140.

and Müller in fact used his ability on several occasions for the direct defence of the interests of the nobility. It is greatly to his credit, however, that his efforts in this direction did not have the result predicted by Gentz. Although he defended the interests of the nobility with the desired zeal he did not refrain from expounding ideas which were distasteful to his clientèle. His Catholicism for instance, which he tried to keep dark as long as possible,¹ made him suspect among the Protestant nobles in Prussia, and his Romantic glorification of feudalism found little favour with Metternich as the exponent of modern centralised absolutism.

We have already stated that most of the Romantics were members of the middle class in rather precarious financial circumstances, and it is most significant that men such as F. Schlegel and A. Müller, although they were raised to noble rank, died in comparative penury.² From a sociological point of view, therefore, the Romantics were a group of men whose lack of economic security divorced them from their own class and forced them to find support elsewhere. Although some of them were theoretically interested in economic problems, none of them participated in those economic activities by which the middle class gradually raised its standard, and Schlegel and Müller could only find a relatively secure position in the Austrian state service. This insecure economic position enhanced their radicalism, if we understand by radicalism an attitude which questions the existing social order and opposes to it ideas which involve decisive changes. It seems strange that the thinkers whose connection with the reaction is well known are here specified as radicals, but their activity in fields other than the political shows us that they were even revolutionaries. Schlegel's earliest production, as we have shown, revealed radicalism even in the political sphere. Thus when

¹ He became a convert in 1805, but as late as 1810 the Austrian police were convinced that he had become a Catholic quite recently. Cf. Müller, *Abhandlungen*, ed. Baxa, Appendix.

² Cf. the death certificate of Adam Müller printed in *Adam Müllers ausgewählte Abhandlungen*, pp. 242, 243.

the Romantics began to concern themselves with politics, an informed observer might have expected that they would place themselves at the head of a progressive movement which would satisfy their deep-rooted desire for a reorganisation of life. Again the comparison with France shows us the reasons why such a movement was impossible in Germany. In France the intellectual leaders could count on the social support of those layers of the population to which they belonged. The Girondists, for instance, were backed by the bourgeoisie of the provinces, while the Jacobins found support among the lower strata of the middle class of Paris.

In Germany no group existed which could produce or attract a revolutionary leader and thus the Romantics remained a small circle of uprooted intellectuals. We notice again and again that the development of the bourgeoisie into a self-confident class, which had gone far in England and France, had hardly begun in Germany. Reforms, as events were to prove, could only be brought about from above or through pressure from the outside. The ludicrously small states of the Empire were not swept away by their exasperated subjects but disappeared under the onslaught of Napoleon, and the reforms in Prussia were carried out after the collapse of 1806 by an intelligent administration over the head of the populace. This is the reason why the Romantics did not become revolutionary, but it still leaves unexplained why they became reactionary. The reason for their alliance with Metternich lies in the fact that they were not only divorced from their class but were also suffering from the consciousness that they belonged to it. How strong this sense of social inferiority was is illustrated by Schlegel's and Müller's efforts to be raised to the rank of nobility and by a characteristic passage in Müller's book on Frederick the Great in which Müller complains that the old division into nobleman and commoner had been replaced by the modern division into good and bad society.¹

¹ *Ueber König Friedrich II*, p. 136.

We hear the voice of the man whose pride was deeply hurt because he did not belong to good society, the entrance to which was usually secured by wealth. This sense of social inferiority determined to a large extent the political thought of the Romantics. It urged them to turn to the past in the hope of finding a social order in which the superiority of the nobility was unchallenged and which was not threatened by revolution or marred by financiers, and it made them incline to adopt an emotional and mystical concept of religion which led them to Catholicism.

The only state in the German Empire which seemed to keep alive the tradition of the mediaeval universal state was Austria, which was a Catholic Power and was still ruled by an Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. It is therefore not surprising that the Romantics turned their eyes to Austria and hoped that forces would come thence to reorganise Germany and to set an example to Europe. The enthusiasm which Frederick the Great had roused had vanished almost entirely and Prussia's weak and aimless policy under his successors disgusted many active minds. Even a man of an unromantic talent like Gentz was forced to leave Prussia in order to seek his fortune in Vienna.

Adam Müller was the outstanding exponent of Romantic political thought since he, from lack of any artistic talent, devoted most of his work to political and economic studies. He was considerably younger than the early Romantics and his intellectual development was therefore decisively influenced by the gathering anti-revolutionary forces in Germany, although as a student in Göttingen he is said to have felt some sympathy for the Revolution. On the other hand it was in Göttingen, the centre of Enlightenment, and at the same time of the anti-revolutionary circle, that he had ample opportunity to study German political questions. It was here that he acquired his sound knowledge of English affairs and his deep and lasting admiration for that country. Burke had perhaps the strongest influence upon him, and he became his most faithful disciple.

on the Continent. He hailed him as the last prophet who had descended on this disenchanted world¹ and counted him amongst the greatest political thinkers of Europe.² To him Burke seemed to be the only thinker who had opposed to the Revolution a political philosophy and who thus stood out from those countless critics who had nothing to offer but negative criticism. Müller realised very clearly that Burke's criticism sprang from the wealth of his political experience and was based on his unshakable belief in the historic continuity of his country. He envied Burke this fortunate position and he did his best to find for Germany a political form with the help of which the danger of revolution could be avoided and which would grow out of the tradition of German history. He believed that he had found this form in the idealised feudal state of the Middle Ages and thus he devoted himself to the elaboration of an idea which Novalis had sketched in his enthusiastic essay on Christendom and Europe. Like Schlegel he became a convert to Catholicism and like his friend Gentz he denounced the Reformation as one of the greatest disasters which had befallen Europe.

His chief attack was directed against the concept of freedom as it had been developed by the revolutionaries and the German idealists. He saw clearly that this concept was based on the assumption that all men were equal by nature or had at least an equal chance in life. He was far from discarding the idea of freedom but he strongly denied that freedom meant the unrestricted activity of equal individuals. According to the Romantic *Weltanschauung* men were not equal but had different functions to fulfil in the organic body politic. Freedom therefore was secured if each individual was able to play the part which was assigned to him in the organism.³ It can easily be seen that this was a very convenient theory for a ruling minority,

¹ *Ueber König Friedrich II*, vol. ii, p. 52.

² Cf. *Elemente der Staatskunst*, vol. i, p. 19.

³ This corresponded to the feudal terminology according to which "Freiheiten" (liberties) and privileges were identical. Cf. Mannheim, *Das Konservative Denken*, p. 92.

who could assert that by ruling they were fulfilling their organic function.

Müller did not realise that his futile attempts to reintroduce a political form which was extinct had nothing to do with Burke's denunciation of the Revolution. When Burke praised the age of chivalry he was using a historic flourish to strengthen his position, but he would have been horrified at the idea that someone would use his arguments in order to revive feudalism. He had, as Lord Morley remarks, "no puny sentimentalism, and none of the mere literary or romantic conservatism of men like Chateaubriand. He lived in the real world, and not in a false dream of some past world that had never been."¹ Müller's conservatism, strongly though it was influenced by Burke, had more in common with De Maistre's mysticism and Chateaubriand's poetic visions. In this the ambiguity of the situation in which the Romantics found themselves comes out most clearly. What in the case of Burke was a genuine pride in tradition was in their case a matter of *ressentiment*. They fought a lost battle and thus their thought has a quixotic character which accounts for their ultimate failure to impress it on their generation.

Modern German scholars have tried to turn Müller into a thinker of the first rank. His work has been classed with that of Plato and he has been praised as the founder of the organic school.² Posterity, however, has thought otherwise and Müller's writings have passed into oblivion for almost a century. It is significant that he was rediscovered at a time when Germany again had to undergo a period of crisis and when her thinkers were inclined to listen to voices which praised the glamour of the past and the greatness of a state which is united and active like an organism.

Although Müller was not an original philosophic thinker he retained a somewhat unfortunate passion for philosophic speculation throughout his life. It certainly did not increase

¹ Morley, *Burke*, p. 94.

² Cf. Baxa, *Einführung in die romantische Staatstheorie*, pp. 98, 164.

the lucidity of his writings, though it may have contributed much to the establishment of his reputation in a period so fond of speculation. His fundamental philosophical principles upon which he hoped to build up a system comparable to that of Fichte and Schelling can be summed up in a few words. He was convinced that the world is a complicated system of contrasts and that reality can only be understood if the thinker remembers that each phenomenon is confronted by another phenomenon which is at the same time its contradiction and complement. Thus man and woman, age and youth, freedom and constraint are interpreted as applications of the concept of antagonism. The greatest mistake which in Müller's opinion the political philosopher can commit is to treat phenomena in isolation, instead of realising that they can only be understood if they are considered as being in a continuous struggle with their counterparts. We need not concern ourselves with the details of this rather obscure theory, we are only interested in the conclusion which Müller draws from it for his political thought. According to him the State is not a machine or an organisation for the protection of property or for the maintenance of the rule of law. He considered all these theories as "static" since they tried to conceive of the State as a phenomenon in isolation instead of considering it dynamically, as a "movement" and opposed to other states. So far this sounds fairly comprehensible. If Müller had realised that the State is the political organisation of a nation as opposed to the political organisations of other nations and would have proceeded to elaborate the constituting factors of such an organisation he might have arrived at a satisfactory theory of the State. It is certainly true that an adequate philosophy of the State can only be achieved if the dynamics of international relations are taken into account. Instead he is carried away by an unbridled mysticism, in which the State becomes the "totality of life." This idea, for the elaboration of which Müller needed many pages, is clearly valueless since it does not throw any light on the intricate problem of the nature of the State.

By identifying State and life Müller may have imparted an increased dignity to the State, but he prevented himself from finding a satisfactory definition since the very essence of defining a phenomenon is to limit it.¹ More interesting are the polemical conclusions which Müller draws from this mystical identification of the State with life. It is employed to fight the concept of Natural Law and to criticise the system of eighteenth-century absolutism.

Since the State is the totality of life it is rooted in the nature of man and there has never been a period when the State did not exist. Thus Müller refuted the thesis of Natural Law that mankind had lived in a pre-State epoch in which only Natural Law ruled. Like Aristotle Müller stressed the essentially social nature of man and maintained that the State was an inevitable form of social life. Like his teacher Fichte he wrote "Man cannot be conceived outside the State."² This is also the reason for his hostility towards the Revolution. He reproached the revolutionaries with having acted as if they stood at the beginning of history and not at the end of a long historical development, and he ridiculed them because they were trying to find outside the State "the Archimedec fulcrum" which did not exist.³ Like most of the Romantics Müller strongly criticised the system of absolutism and above all the Prussian monarchy as it developed under Frederick II. His chief objection was that Frederick ruled his state like a machine and not like an organism. We remember that Novalis raised the same objection, which becomes intelligible if we bear in mind that the political ideal of the Romantics was the restoration of the feudal state. It is beyond doubt that Frederick's policy of rigid concentration of power was an important factor in the final overthrow of the feudal system. The Prussian king employed the nobles of his country in the army and the higher civil service, but he endeavoured to destroy their political predominance which in feudal times had rested on the close

¹ Cf. Aris, *Die Staatslehre Adam Müllers*, p. 17

² *Elemente der Staatskunst*, vol. ii, p. 29.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

connection between political power and landed property. As a consequence of mercantilist theories much had been done in his reign towards the mobilisation of landed property, a development which seemed to Müller the root of all social evil.

Müller does not tire of describing the State as an organic entity. He is completely in agreement with Burke that "the State ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco,"¹ but he goes further than Burke when he defines the State "as the intimate alliance of all physical and intellectual needs, of the whole physical and intellectual wealth, of the whole internal and external life of a nation, into a great, energetic, infinitely moved and alive whole."² If this means anything, it means that the citizen ought to obey the State in all circumstances since there can be no life for him outside the State. It further expresses the Romantic belief that the Catholic feudal State would be the ideal form of political organisation. This glorification of the State shows us how far political thought had moved from the ideas of the Enlightenment. Müller initiated a movement which was to find its climax in Hegel's philosophy and in Bismarck's policy and which, after its Romantic extravagances had been eliminated, was to be the political philosophy of an important section of the German middle classes.

Müller also uses his philosophical principle of antagonism for the justification of war and the refutation of the idea of a league of nations or a universal state. In his opinion a state can only thrive if it is continuously challenged by other states and it is itself only the product of war. Müller does not seem to have been aware that this opinion was hardly compatible with his Catholicism. In a typically Romantic way he describes history as the continuous struggle of mankind with nature

¹ *Reflections on the French Revolution*, p. 93.

² *Elemente der Staatskunst*, vol. i, p. 37.

and the State as the alliance of human beings formed in order to carry out this struggle.¹

Müller is convinced that if the world were organised into one single state all political life would cease. According to the Romantic concept life develops only where there is struggle and where each state is "forced to feel and organise itself as a whole over against another whole which threatens its existence."² This doctrine was the expression of the political situation of Europe in which Müller found himself. When he delivered his lectures on politics in which he developed these ideas (1810), Napoleon was at the height of his power and Europe, with the exception of England and Russia, subject to his rule. It was hardly the time for the propagation of pacifist schemes while in Spain, Austria, and Germany a strong resistance was forming, to which Müller's doctrine gave expression as did those of Fichte and Schleiermacher. To attain this goal of liberating the Empire from the yoke of Napoleon, Müller did not only call in the aid of the living but also of the dead. The State was conceived not only as an association of the living but also as a partnership of the ancestors and their successors. This also was an idea which Müller had found in Burke and he used it to stress the continuity which historical development gave to the State. This belief in the value of tradition was one of the fundamental concepts of his conservatism; it furnished him with a further argument against Natural Law, which was not the result of historic growth but was derived from abstract reason. It further served him in his violent attack on the revolutionaries who in his opinion tried to discard the sacred heritage bestowed on them by their ancestors.

Müller compared the State to a family or to a marriage. He used these metaphors taken from the storehouse of the organic theory in order to justify the domination of the nobility. Nobility represents age in the State, and strangely enough also the female element which according to Müller is more conserva-

¹ *Elemente der Staatskunst*, vol. i, p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 7.

tive than the male. Müller liked to contrast his political theory with that of the ancients, and he saw the greatest difference between the ancient and the mediaeval concepts of the State in the fact that in the Greek states age was represented in a special Senate whereas in the mediaeval state it was represented by hereditary nobility whose individual members might actually be young men. His ideal, as he expressed it in his paradoxical way, was a state in which the young acted as if they represented age and the old as if they were the spokesmen of youth. There is no doubt that Müller idealised the nobility. In his opinion the nobleman was the best guarantee for the maintenance of tradition and the visible representative of the unity and continuity of the State. In order to understand Müller's attitude towards nobility, which was shared by so many conservative members of the middle class, we must glance at his theory of property. If Müller talks of property, he characteristically means real property, which seemed to him the backbone of society. To him property did not consist in the mere possession of things but in a kind of mutual relation between things and man; that is to say, man does not possess the thing for its own sake but for the use which he makes of it for the community. Every proprietor therefore has only temporary use of the things which he possesses, while the things themselves belong just as much to former as to later generations. In this Müller sees the essence of feudalism. The land belongs to the noble family, not to the present owner, who is only the representative of the "idea of property," and all the difficulties which the revolutionary period had witnessed were, Müller is convinced, caused by the attempts to transmute feudal property into absolute property and thus to make nobility superfluous.¹ Müller rightly points out that the concept of absolute property is a product of Roman jurisprudence and that the feudal order was doomed when Roman law was intro-

¹ Müller's attack is chiefly directed against people like F. Buchholz who pleaded for the abolition of hereditary nobility. Cf. *Der neue Leviathan*, p. 64 ff.

duced into Germany, but he is unable to realise that the feudal form of property was the outcome of certain economic conditions and that the introduction of private property was inevitable when the forms of production had changed. He abuses the French Revolution as a reaction of Roman private law from mediaeval law and he is not aware that in doing so he bestows the highest possible praise on it.¹ The Revolution indeed finally established free and unfettered property which was the indispensable foundation for the capitalist development of the future.

It is a curious phenomenon that this group of middle class intellectuals of whom Müller is here treated as a spokesman, absolutely refused to see the signs of the times. In Müller, who was an eminent economist, this is particularly remarkable since he was deeply impressed by Adam Smith and was for a long time his faithful disciple. But we must be careful not to measure political thought in Germany by standards taken from contemporary thought in France and England. The political greatness of these two countries was of comparatively modern growth, whereas the heyday of Germany had been the feudal period of the early Middle Ages when a German Emperor ruled Europe. The Romantics did not see that the collapse of Germany in 1806 was to a large extent due to the fact that the feudal system in Germany was not superseded in time, as had happened in France and England. They did not know that the result of the history of feudal Germany between the tenth and the twelfth centuries had been "the conversion of the once strong and magnificent German kingdom into a rope of sand, a confused and jarring chaos of small and warring states ruled by petty dynasts."² They only saw that the State had disintegrated and believed that it had been strong and united all through the Middle Ages. Thus they drew the inference that the mediaeval was the ideal order for Germany. When they talked of feudalism they had a system in view in

¹ *Elemente*, vol. i, p. 170.

² J. W. Thompson, *Feudal Germany*, p. xvi.

which there was no strife between the Crown and the estates, in which the noblemen honoured the arts and the merchants followed the example set by the Hansa. When they objected to the concept of absolute private property they vaguely anticipated the complete social disruption which was to be the consequence of the mechanisation of labour. They were afraid that the mobilisation of property would destroy the community spirit and they did not realise that no true community spirit existed. Thus they constructed an ideal picture of feudalism according to which the lord held his land in trust for the community and served not his particular interests but the interests of the whole. We need nor concern ourselves with the refutation of this construction which was at variance with the otherwise strong historical sense of the Romantics. Müller's attacks in the sphere of economics were chiefly directed against Adam Smith, whom he had come to consider as the classic spokesman of economic liberalism and the herald of capitalism. Müller deeply resented Smith's attempts to dissolve the social order into a mechanism composed of individuals as the ultimate social units, and he was convinced that Smith's appeal to and reliance on self-interest would lead to anarchy.

Thus Müller led the first attack against capitalism long before it was fully developed and forty years before Marx and Engels initiated the other great anti-capitalist movement with the *Communist Manifesto*. The Romantic and the Marxian criticism of capitalism have one point in common. According to both, capitalism is nothing but disguised anarchy with the ruthless search for profits as its chief driving force. But while the Romantics believed that property would become less dangerous if it belonged to corporations and families the Marxians deemed it utterly pernicious in itself. If modern Fascism has any theoretical foundation at all it is to be found in Romanticism.

The ideas of the Romantics would not have found even that small echo which they actually produced if Germany had

been at the beginning of an industrial revolution like England or if it had had a conscious middle class like France. Müller's ideas, however, remained without influence outside the lecture room and the salon. This was due to the vagueness and evasiveness of his thought when it came to defining practical political problems. His method of antithesis could be used conveniently in many ways, but the important point was that he did not challenge the established order, since he believed in monarchy, and that he did not dream of raising political demands on behalf of the middle class, which alone could become dangerous to the *ancien régime* in Germany. It is very significant that none of the Romantics (with the exception of Schleiermacher, who had no use for feudalism) found admission to Prussia, the country in which revolutionary reforms were at least carried out, even though from above. The Prussian statesmen, though far from being liberal, had learned their lesson from the Revolution and because they understood the signs of the time were able to carry out those reforms which the middle class had proved itself unable to put into practice.

Müller violently attacked Fichte's ideal of the closed commercial state which seemed to him nothing but a futile construction. His ideal was a state in which agriculture and trade, nobility and the merchant class complemented each other and where there was a balance of all the divergent economic forces.¹ He was convinced that only such states would survive as were commercial and agricultural units at the same time, and he ascribed the superiority of Europe over the other continents to the fact that it contained so many states in which trade and agriculture stood in an organic relation to one another. He adopted Montesquieu's and Herder's idea that each state represented mankind in a particular way, since the political fate of each state was determined by its geographical situation which shaped the character of its inhabitants and of its economic system.

If Müller turned against the ideal of a universal state or

¹ *Elemente*, vol. i, p. 196.

a league of nations, he did not give up the concept of the balance of power. He strongly urged that states must not strive to augment their territories but must endeavour to become totalitarian within their boundaries. It is difficult to understand what Müller meant by this and we see again that he had no notion of the problems which faced a comity of nations each trying to secure economic superiority. In a strange way Müller's doctrine resembles the *laisser-faire* theory in that he was convinced that out of the inevitable struggle the desired balance would emerge. The only demands he makes for the attainment of this goal are the reintroduction of feudalism and the revival of mediaeval Catholicism. In the *Elements of Politics* the religious note is not yet very strong, though Müller already denounced Protestantism as the cause of all the trouble in modern Europe and he maintained that the Catholic religion was the only tie which united the nations of Europe.

As he grew older he developed more and more a theocratic idea of the State, very much in the same way as Fr. Schlegel, and like his contemporary De Maistre he dreamed of a powerful Papacy. He taught that God is the author of the State and the sole source of the power of kings, and he was convinced that future generations would see in these times of revolutionary change only the reawakening of religion. In this as in many things Müller was utterly mistaken; he did not realise that the nations would try to build up a political system the basis of which was economic and political liberty and the clear separation of State and Church.

It has been said that with the Romantics literature entered into politics. The political poet was indeed a common figure in the history of the nineteenth century, whereas he had been rare in the Germany of the preceding century. The development of the Romantics is significant in still another way, it illustrates the dangerous or at least futile rôle which intellectuals can play if they are ambitious, dissatisfied and unable to find scope for their activities. Romantic miscalculation

of facts and distortion of historic reality would have become dangerous if they had been taken up by a whole class which was itself dissatisfied and willing to submit to ambitious and unscrupulous leaders. But the Romantics remained comparatively ineffective, since the whole trend of the time was against them and the vast majority of their own class was not willing to accept their theories. Thus, in spite of the actual support which they gave to the forces of reaction they cannot be held responsible for the reactionary wave which swept over Germany.

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CHAPTER XI

GÖRRES

JOSEPH GÖRRES, perhaps the most outstanding representative of Catholic political thought in Germany, was born in the Rhineland, in that part of the Empire which had contributed so much to German civilisation and which had determined so often the political fate of Germany. Through its constant contact with France it had always adopted French ideas eagerly, but it was at the same time more conscious of its close connection with German civilisation than were the other parts of the Empire. Its political organisation was typical of the decay of the Holy Roman Empire, the nucleus of which it once had been. This district, in which Charlemagne had held court and from which he ruled Europe, was in Görres' times divided up amongst three ecclesiastical and some other states in which administration was ineffective and corrupt. Their antiquated governmental system stood in strange contrast to the level of comparative economic prosperity which the country enjoyed. Nowhere in Germany were there more towns, nowhere was there such a prosperous middle class as in the Rhineland.¹ Cologne was still one of the wealthiest towns in Germany in the eighteenth century, though it had lost much of its ancient splendour after the Dutch had closed the mouth of the Rhine to German merchants. The absence of the class of feudal landowners was perhaps the most important factor from the political point of view. Most of the peasants were freeholders or were in the service of the clergy, who on the whole seem to have wielded their economic power with moderation, or at least with greater consideration than the big landowners in the east. The chief grievances from which the population suffered were the evident extravagance of the courts and the

¹ Görres describes the attitude of this middle class very well in his book *Germany and the Revolution*, p. 55.

injustice of the system of taxation which left the whole financial burden on the shoulders of the peasants and burghers. The question of equal taxation was indeed the most important political issue in the continuous struggles between the estates and the governments, and it is significant that no agreement could be reached till the armies of Napoleon swept away the ecclesiastical states and introduced the new social order which the French Revolution had established. It was natural that the Rhineland should be particularly open to French influence and that it should set the pace for the rest of Germany in many ways. Its small courts emulated Versailles in splendour though not in good taste, and even its middle classes took French civilisation as their model. Most important of all was the fact that this prosperous and progressive district was the bone of contention between France and Germany. The French were inclined to consider the Rhine as their natural frontier and their aim was accordingly to annex the district on its left bank or at least to reduce its states to virtual dependence on France. The climax of this policy was the Rhine Confederation of Napoleon, who achieved what the armies of the Revolution had begun soon after the storming of the Bastille. Görres was in the prime of his life when Napoleon's empire collapsed and his thought faithfully mirrored the political fate of his home province and the political experiences of his compatriots. At the time when he was beginning to think about political questions he witnessed the easy victories of Custine and Kellerman over the powerless ecclesiastical states; during the best years of his manhood he noticed all the changes which a progressive though dictatorial administration brought over the country, and when he retired into exile the Rhineland was incorporated in a victorious and reactionary Prussia.

Görres started his remarkable career as a Jacobin and as an enthusiastic follower of French ideals. It is highly probable, though not proved, that as a youth of about twenty he visited the famous Jacobin club in Mainz and came into contact with

some of its prominent members; it is beyond doubt that he was strongly influenced by them.¹ We have dealt in our first chapter with these typical middle class liberals who were more fortunate as teachers of moral philosophy than as politicians; in this context it remains to investigate how far their thought was characteristic of public opinion in the Rhineland. This question is identical with another which has caused much controversy: did the Rhinelanders welcome the French revolutionary armies as liberators or did they offer a national resistance to them as unwelcome intruders? French scholars have asserted that the whole population was not only easily conquered but was also readily convinced that the social system introduced by the revolutionaries was better than that of the *ancien régime*. German scholars on the other hand, while they admit that the old system was rotten and fully deserved its fate, assert that the population very soon became nationalistic in outlook and began to hate the French as alien conquerors. It is obvious that in this instance, as in so many others, historical research has been biased by national prejudices. This becomes most clear if we compare the judgments which historians have passed on Görres and Forster respectively. The young Görres had very much the same political outlook as Forster and acted politically in the same way, the difference only was that Forster died comparatively young in exile, while Görres came to be one of the most ardent foes of Napoleon and one of the most passionate advocates of a united Germany. In consequence some German historians have reviled Forster as a betrayer of his fatherland and conveniently overlooked the political activity of the young Görres as a youthful aberration.²

In reality both Forster and Görres were representatives of a group of men whose political thought was determined by the particular social and intellectual circumstances which

¹ Cf. Hansen, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 508 ff.

² The worst example of that kind of historiography is the book by Klein, *Forster in Mainz*.

prevailed in the Rhineland. In his school in Coblenz, Görres had been under the influence of teachers who propagated the ideals of the Enlightenment and instilled into the boy an enthusiastic love of ancient republicanism. One of the teachers, Nicola, was an outspoken Kantian, and it is from him that Görres learned to approach political questions from the point of view of the moral philosopher.¹ Most of these teachers were at heart republicans, for the simple reason that they were disgusted by the extravagance and corruption of the courts while they themselves were forced to lead a miserable and insignificant existence.² If the intellectuals of the whole of Germany were in favour of the Revolution, this applies to an even greater degree to those of the Rhineland. Görres only expressed what the great majority of professors, teachers, writers and members of the professions felt. There can be no doubt that the majority of Rhenish intellectuals, that is to say the more advanced section of the middle classes, greeted the French with enthusiasm and were strongly in favour of a close political union between France and the Rhineland. It is absurd to judge their activities in this respect by standards of modern nationalism. A strong national consciousness did not exist in any class and we must always bear in mind that the French Republic seemed to many to be the embodiment of the spirit of Enlightenment and not a state which tried to achieve national ends. The French influence was particularly strong since the Germans had been used for more than a century to regard French civilisation as superior, and since the greatest political thinkers of the eighteenth century had been French. When Forster and Görres demanded the union of the Rhineland with France they thought first and foremost of a union with the country which had produced Rousseau and Montesquieu. When they supported the French government they did so because

¹ Hansen, vol. i, p. 686 ff. The books of Hume, Horne, Montesquieu and Schlözer were used as history text-books. It is further interesting to note that according to the curriculum Herder's *Ideen* had to be used. Reisse, *die weltanschauliche Entwicklung des jungen Görres*, p. 17.

² Cf. Marx, J., *Geschichte des Erzstifts Trier*, p. 88 ff.

they thought it would realise the ideals of the Enlightenment and because they deemed it a moral duty of every individual to support such a government. Görres later tried to justify his attitude by asserting that he intended to create an independent state which corresponded to Lotharingia as constituted by the Treaty of Verdun. But this was at best self-deception.

Nevertheless, the enthusiasm in the Rhineland was far from being unanimous and there was much resistance, which increased with every year of the occupation. We have shown in the first chapter that the members of the middle classes kept aloof. Characteristic of their political outlook is a petition by the guild of commerce to Custine in which the burghers implored the French general to maintain the Constitution of the Holy Roman Empire and to restore their prince.¹ Although there was a stronger middle class in the Rhineland than in any other part of the Empire, it still lacked any consciousness of its own position and of its tasks. This was clearly recognised in a letter which the Jacobin club of Mainz sent to the Jacobins in Paris and in which the writer deplored "the entire absence of an enlightened, wealthy and effective middle class."² It was natural that the members of the guilds who enjoyed important economic prerogatives were opposed to the French, since they knew that the introduction of the revolutionary principles would put an end to the guilds altogether.³ The officials in the towns, who to a large extent came from the middle classes, were likewise anti-French since they were in danger of losing their position in Government and Court. Thus it came about that the economic foundations on which the middle classes were to build their power were laid in Germany, not by the German members of these classes but by the French conquerors. This is another ominous sign for the political development in Germany.

¹ Hansen, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 570.

² Hansen, loc. cit., p. 639.

³ Of the ninety-seven members of the guild in Mainz, only thirteen voted for the introduction of the French Constitution. Hansen, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 573. Out of 10,000 inhabitants, only 375 took the oath of allegiance in 1793. Hansen, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 764.

Another factor which influenced political opinion was that many people felt a traditional attachment to the Holy Roman Empire and to their princes. Though the ecclesiastical states in the Rhineland were inefficiently governed, they were no longer wholly despotically ruled and their Governments allowed a certain though limited amount of collaboration to their estates.¹ Only the Jews were wholeheartedly and unhesitatingly pro-French, since they knew that one of the revolutionary principles was their political and social emancipation, decided on by the Constituent Assembly on 28th September, 1791. The bulk of the population, as we know from countless reports, received the French armies calmly, without enthusiasm but also without marked hostility.² This changed very soon, however, when the strain of the war was acutely felt and the armies of occupation demanded heavy contributions for which they offered valueless assignats. There was undoubtedly much corruption and inefficiency among the French officials and many acts of gross injustice and even violence, which caused bitterness among the good-natured Rhinelanders. "Our townsmen," Horstmann wrote in 1793, "have been thoroughly cured of the revolutionary fever by a universal medicine: their acquaintance with the republicans."³

Görres' own writings in this period reflect the gradual development of an anti-French spirit. In his first pamphlet on the problems of perpetual peace published in 1795 he put forward ideas which Rousseau, Condorcet, Kant and Fichte had taught him.⁴ Although this youthful contribution is unoriginal, it is a valuable document since it shows how far these ideas had penetrated into the thought of the intellectual spokesmen of the middle classes. It was the political philosophy

¹ See Hashagen, *Das Rheinland*, p. 198 ff.

² Custine disappointedly reported to his Government: "Ces Rhénans veulent rester esclaves; nos commissaires ont eu peu de connaissance de leur esprit et de leur génie; ils pensaient en un jour changer leur caractère, et ces hommes phlegmatiques se sont revoltés contre de semblables idées." Hansen, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 762.

³ Hansen, loc. cit., vol. ii, p. 89, Introduction.

⁴ Cf. *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. i, p. 4 ff.

of the Enlightenment which determined the tenor of the pamphlet, its belief in peace as an ideal demanded by reason and its insistence on happiness as the ultimate goal of man. The point of departure for the young political philosopher was the isolated individual, and freedom consisted in the absence of any constraint which might violate the dignity of the individual. Görres shared the prevailing belief in the continuous progress of mankind as it has been passionately voiced by Condorcet in a work which Brailsford aptly describes as "perhaps the most confident statement of a reasoned optimism in European literature."¹ He also shared Condorcet's hatred of the Church and he raised in this early study a demand which he took over from Fichte and on which he was to insist throughout his life—the sharp separation of the Church from the State. "State and Church," he wrote, "stand in no relation to one another, the domain of the former is the finite, that of the latter the eternal."² Of Rome he spoke as of "the metropolis of the empire of stupidity."³ We notice this furious hatred of the Church and the clergy in all his early writings and see how the rational spirit of the Enlightenment had determined the outlook of this young man who was to become the most famous German Catholic of the nineteenth century.⁴ Even in this early period, however, his distrust of the clergy did not lead him to atheism but only to a vigorous enforcement of the enlightened principle of tolerance. He demanded that the citizens should not be hindered in the performance of their religious duties unless they were contrary to moral law or to the ends of the State.

It was not only in the religious sphere that Görres was a radical, his entire political thought was that of a Jacobin. When he wholeheartedly supported the French Revolution he was not only in agreement with a great number of enlightened intellectuals but also with a considerable section of public

¹ *Esquisse des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain*, published 1795. Brailsford, Shelley, Godwin, and their circle, p. 27.

² *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. i, p. 6.

³ Hashagen, loc. cit., p. 418

⁴ See Dempf, *Görres, spricht zu unserer Zeit*, p. x.

opinion in his home town. In this progressive town, which had a large share in the trade of the Rhine, many people had come to realise that the old ecclesiastical state was incapable of meeting the rising demand of a prosperous class for which the abolition of feudal rights had no terrifying significance. Görres, however, was far from realising the economic implications and presuppositions of political thought. He was surprisingly little concerned with economic problems and he approached political questions entirely from the point of view of the moralist who is convinced that political and moral progress cannot be separated from one another. In this he followed the tradition of the school of German idealists whose decisive influence on him we have already noticed. This moralist attitude induced him, as it did Kant and Fichte, to disregard to a large extent the actual historical development and to construct a theoretical system which could hardly be applied to reality. Görres never lost the speculative trend which might be called a particular characteristic of German thought but which was essentially the heritage of the Enlightenment and an indication of that remoteness from life which was typical of the entire generation. Görres was a republican in this period not because he believed or even conceived as possible that the economic development required some sort of self-government, but because he was convinced that the principle of virtue was secured only in a republic and that only the republic realises the moral postulates. The part played by the concept of virtue in French political thought since Montesquieu is well known, though it is hard to find out what it actually implied. The chief root of Görres' radical republicanism was his hatred of absolutism, which he retained even after his outlook had fundamentally changed. When he denounced absolutism, even in the enlightened form which it had assumed in Prussia under Frederick the Great, he was in agreement with almost all thinkers outside Prussia, and he voiced the unconscious demand of the middle class to participate in the government in some way or other. This distrust of Prussian

absolutism, especially of the Prussian bureaucracy, was an important factor in the relation between the Rhineland and Prussia throughout the nineteenth century.

Treitschke called Görres "an unpolitical mind, one without any penetrating knowledge of affairs, devoid of understanding of the contemporary relationships of political powers."¹ This judgment is certainly exaggerated, but there is an element of truth in it. Görres was not unpolitically minded in the sense that he had no interest in and understanding for political problems, but he was essentially utopian in his outlook. In this respect he belonged to the Romantics from his early youth though he did not join their circle until 1806-1808. Like Rousseau he was convinced that representation was incompatible with democracy and he praised the ideal of a small democratic republic as the most "moral" state, but at the same time he stated that this ideal was unattainable. In his political creed, which he published in 1797, he wrote: "I believe in a continuous progress of mankind," but he added, "I believe that the century for the institution of the democratic form has not appeared yet and will not appear for a long time to come."

It was unavoidable that this highly strung moral enthusiasm should suffer disappointment very soon. Görres began as a very young man his career as a publicist which was to make him famous. He edited a small radical journal in which he propounded his republican ideals and in which he denounced all misdeeds committed by the French administration. The motto of the journal was: "Eternal war to all scoundrels; the hand to the virtuous man."² It must, however, be noticed that in this fight against French officials national considerations played no part. Görres' aim was "to further the destiny of mankind," not to defend German national interests.³ It was not surprising that Görres soon got into difficulties with the French authorities; he was repeatedly put into prison and his

¹ Treitschke, *German History*, English translation, vol. i, p. 604.

² *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. i, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, vol. i, p. 22.

paper was eventually suppressed. He was the more disappointed with the shortcomings of the new régime since he had been convinced that France had a mission to fulfil for mankind. The breach with France resulting from his disillusionment became final when in 1800 he went to Paris as a deputy of the Rhineland to demand a clear definition of the relations of his country with the Republic. "I have seen the actors undressed behind the scenes," Görres wrote from Paris, and he returned a convinced adversary of the separation of the Rhineland from Germany.¹ He gave an account of this journey which throws an interesting light on his thought.² It is in this writing that for the first time he uttered views which were to form the basis for his later conservatism, though he still professed adherence to French principles. He was one of the first in Germany to recognise that Napoleon, though he was the heir of the Revolution, was at the same time its liquidator and had turned it into a national movement with imperialist aims. With the 18th Brumaire the Revolution had in his opinion ceased to be a movement which set the pace for the world and had degenerated into an immoral dictatorship. Görres became anti-French not because he lost his belief in republican principles but because he lost his confidence in the French Republicans. He still thought that the Revolution had produced a wholesome effect in liberating the State from the influence of the priests and in separating political and religious institutions.³ In his letters to his fiancée he gave vivid expression to the deep pessimism which he felt as a reaction from his early enthusiasm and which made him believe that the whole of his generation was lost to the cause of liberty, but he exhorted her at the same time not to lose hope in the future.⁴ The most important result of this journey to Paris was the profound change towards the national question which had taken place in Görres' mind. He discovered that there was a national difference between French and German and that the idea of a natural frontier

¹ *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. i, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 106.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. vii, p. 67.

was only a theoretical construction. Since he approached all political questions from a moral point of view, he gave a characterisation of the two nations which stressed the fundamental difference in their moral outlook. This characterisation is highly interesting since it became the standard by which the Germans came to judge the French.¹ According to Görres the French were superficial and agile, easily inflammable and irritable, gay and witty, whereas the Germans showed exactly the opposite dispositions. No wonder, then, that it seemed impossible to him that a German country like the Rhineland could be incorporated into France. In a few years Görres had changed from a cosmopolitan to a nationalist, thus anticipating and indicating the development towards nationalism which the German middle classes were to undergo as the industrialisation of Germany advanced.

Görres' attitude towards the Revolution in this period is an instructive indication of the ferment of German political thought. If he pronounced judgment on the Revolution on moral grounds because of its failure to achieve the ends which the German enthusiasts expected it to achieve, he revealed that the essential importance of the Revolution was nowhere grasped in Germany. Görres was historically minded enough to realise that Napoleon was the inevitable outcome of this gigantic experiment in government, but he was not able to see that though the Revolution had not realised the phantom of the perfect moral state it had at least finally destroyed the feudal order. Görres' political thought, like that of most of his German contemporaries, dwelt on a higher plane than that of actual politics. This was understandable in members of a class which had little or no political experience, and since their sphere of influence was primarily the cultural one they approached even political problems from the philosophical rather than from the practical angle. Görres was far from conceiving the idea of a strong national state and he strongly denounced the glori-

¹ Görres coined the term "Erbfeind" (hereditary foe) for the French. Berger, *Görres, als politischer Publizist*, p. 35.

fication of power for power's sake, which is probably the reason why the arch-nationalist Treitschke talks so slightlying of him. His nationalism was in the first place a cultural concept, as is shown by the fact that he shared the erroneous opinion of Herder that language is the chief element by which nations are constituted. He kept his ideal of a constitutional republic long after he had ceased to admire the French Revolution, though he despaired of its immediate realisation and he was strongly opposed to any kind of Machiavellism. In 1800 Görres was on the way to becoming a conservative thinker, but he retained and was to retain to the end a strong tinge of liberalism. The conservative as well as the liberal movement in Germany originated in 1789, the former as a reaction from, the latter as an application of, French ideas.¹ It has often been maintained that Görres more or less abruptly changed over from liberalism to conservatism after the wickedness of the French had taught him that his early political position was a mere aberration.² In reality there was no such rupture in Görres' thought. Even when he reacted from the Revolution he continued to be strongly influenced by it, and if he became more conservative he did so because he saw that the first presupposition of liberalism, a strong and self-confident middle class, was lacking in Germany. On the other hand certain forces which made for conservatism had been in his mind all the time. Görres had also been influenced by Möser and Herder, and he acquired from them a deep interest in Germany's past, an interest which was to become his comfort in the days of national calamity.

The absence of a strong middle class prevented the formation of political parties in Germany. Thus it is somewhat misleading to talk of liberals and conservatives in this period. The political thinkers cannot properly be classified as liberals or conservatives because there were too many intermediate positions between the two. We cannot venture here upon an analysis of these

¹ Wahl, *Beiträge zur deutschen Parteigeschichte im 19 Jahrhundert*, p. 547.

² Cf. Galland, *Joseph von Görres*, *passim*.

two doctrines, and we must content ourselves with accepting the definition given by Wahl according to which the liberal proceeds from the "ought," whereas the conservative proceeds from the "being."¹ The liberal, that is to say, tries to mould the world after preconceived principles, whereas the conservative views the political reality in its historic context from which he takes the principles for his actions. Rousseau is an example of the liberal, Burke of the conservative attitude. Görres was a liberal in so far as he tried to apply principles of moral philosophy to politics, but he was at the same time a conservative in so far as he developed a strong historic sense which made him shrink from all violent and abrupt changes of the social order.

We have had occasion to show how German thinkers of different schools of thought became disappointed and disillusioned when political reality did not coincide with their expectations, and how they retreated from the field of politics. Görres acted in exactly the same way after his disappointment with the French Revolution. "It was not this which I expected seven years ago, not this which then filled my imagination with beautiful images. It is gone and I thank God that I have saved my inclination for art and science out of the wreck," he wrote to his fiancée.² And to art and science he devoted his life entirely during the next twelve years. He learned Persian, he studied the history of mythology, he acquired a vast though somewhat scattered knowledge of natural sciences and he occupied himself with the development of German literature. Under the influence of Schelling, he tried to build up a philosophy of history more mystical even than that of Schelling, and he developed a typical Romantic system in which the principle of polarity plays the chief part. As an idealist he believed that intellectual and moral forces determine historic development, and he saw the essence of history in the continuous struggle between spirit and nature, freedom and necessity. As early as in his youthful essay on perpetual peace he had

¹ Loc. cit., p. 539.

² *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. vii, p. 67.

contrasted despotism and republicanism, but then he had decided the issue in favour of republicanism; now he professed himself a constitutional monarchist. The most decisive influence of this period was that which the younger Romantics, Arnim and Brentano, exerted on him. Görres had tried to escape from the problems of the present by viewing his own time only as a part of a gigantic historic process, now the Romantics taught him to turn his eyes to the Middle Ages and their political and cultural forms. The religious disposition of his mind, which he had sought to repress in his period of Jacobinism but which had never entirely vanished, began to dominate his political outlook until in the last period of his life it entirely submerged the political thinker in him. This development also was typical of the thought of the middle classes in Germany. Thousands of young German Catholics whose faith had been shattered under the influence of the Enlightenment turned to their Church with greater zest than ever when the reaction set in.

Arnim and Brentano published during the years 1806-1808 a collection of German folk songs, which has rightly been described as a political event though its contents seem as remote from politics as possible. It is significant that this collection of a national treasure, which stirred up a tremendous enthusiasm for the German past, was published at a time when Germany lay prostrate at the feet of Napoleon. It was at this time also that Sulpice Boisserée, another member of this circle, measured out the Cathedral of Cologne and started a campaign for the completion of the building which was to be a monument of German mediaeval civilisation and an ensign for German grandeur. The spies of Napoleon prevented any political activity, but they could not hinder the national forces from gathering in a common enthusiasm for the treasures of German art and literature.

Under the influence of his Romantic friends Görres' concept of the State became definitely Romantic. He now praised the Holy Roman Empire as the incarnation of the mediaeval spirit of universality, whereas in his first period he had had only

words of contempt for it. He adopted the organic concept and his ideal became that of the corporate state. Like Novalis he ascribed to the king a symbolic rôle, the monarch "is the idea of the State which has become visible, its living law."¹ Democracy now seemed to him a form of decomposition, while monarchy was the form of synthesis. In this the experience of the Napoleonic invasion can clearly be detected. Görres' generation had started by fighting against the petty despotism of the German princes only to find that the greatest despotism resulted from the Revolution. No wonder, then, that these men turned to the past of which a beautiful picture of harmonious collaboration could be painted. Görres' ideal of the State was a construction of his imagination, wholly remote from reality, impossible of achievement and therefore incapable of forming the nucleus of a political movement. He distinguished between three estates or corporations and believed thus that he could revive the formation of feudal society. These estates were the nobility, the clergy, and the burghers, which Görres described as the *Wehrstand* (estate of defence), *Lehrstand* (estate of teaching), and *Nährstand* (estate of provisioning). It is obvious that this differentiation is of no practical value. It was simply not true that the nobility was the class of the warriors, and it had never been true except perhaps for the period of early feudalism. The chief problem with which modern society is confronted is not the relation of estates but that of classes which cut right across the organisation outlined by Görres. It is impossible to treat the estate of the burghers as a social unit when inside it insuperable differences of economic interests appear. Of this problem Görres had no notion and he thus involved himself in insoluble contradictions. He demanded the abolition of serfdom which was the backbone of the feudal order, but he advocated the maintenance of entailed estates; he wanted the survival of the guilds but he declared his sympathy with the system of free trade, and he became a protectionist only when he saw that English trade threatened

¹ *Works*, ed. Schellberg, vol. i, p. 473.

Germany's prosperity. He realised, like the physiocrats before him, that too much inequality of property endangered the social peace and would result in a revolution by which the order of property would be reversed, but he did not see that only the State could effectively regulate the distribution of property. It was the liberal in him who allocated to the State a narrow sphere of activity and made him believe that in a perfect society the State would disappear.¹

In Görres' case also the organic metaphor serves more as a poetic transcription of his desire for unity than as a means to explain the functioning of the different political forces in the State. He demands that the State should form itself according to the pattern which nature has given in the organism,² but on close examination we notice that this does not mean more than that the State ought to be organised satisfactorily. We learn that in a true organic State despotism and republicanism balance each other, that social life is based on the polarity of freedom and necessity, but this does not carry us very far since Görres does not proceed to show in particular how these different elements determine political life in practice. He contents himself with carrying the organic analogy as far as possible, and this leads to meaningless statements such as that the constitution is like health, the equilibrium of all forces,³ or that the republican principle is that of the day and the despotic principle that of the night.⁴ In spite of his Romanticism his political thought is still that of the moralist and he demands that the State should realise the good.⁵ His political ideal is not very remote from that of the thinkers who demanded a mild constitutionalism, that is to say some sort of national representation. It soon became obvious that this development was unavoidable, but there was a fierce discussion as to how representation was to be organised. The liberals wanted a representation on the basis of equality while the conservatives

¹ Cf. *Works*, ed. Schellberg, vol. i, p. 196.

² *Ibid.*, vol. iii, p. 375.

³ *Ibid.*, ed. M. Görres, vol. i, p. 283.

⁴ Uhlmann, *Joseph Görres*, etc., p. 49.

⁵ Cf. *Works*, ed. Schellberg, vol. iv, p. 327.

wanted a system by which the historic rights of the estates were safeguarded. Görres, like his Romantic friends, used the organic principle to justify the inequality of the citizens and the division of the State into estates. He was, therefore, in favour of a representation which was based on this division and he clearly denounced at this stage the idea of a democratic system, which he had advocated in his years of Jacobinism.

Görres established his fame as one of the intellectual leaders of the struggle with Napoleon. He founded a journal, *Der Rheinische Merkur*, which for two years became the mouthpiece of public opinion in Germany. He was the first political journalist in Germany after Schlözer, and his paper exerted an amazing influence as long as the Prussian Government allowed it to carry on. Görres was the typical spokesman of middle-class thought when he wrote articles full of violent patriotism against Napoleon and the French. So far he was in agreement with the Prussian Government, which needed the patriotic enthusiasm of the masses in order to conduct the war. Soon, however, the Government became afraid of the popular movement which might easily raise democratic demands, and the minister Hardenberg urged Görres not to write against the French people but only against Napoleon. The conflict with the Government became apparent when the war was finished and Görres continued to make propaganda for his national liberal ideals. It is true that his concept of the State had not become more lucid and definite in the meantime, but he was definite enough in his demand for a united Germany and for the granting of some sort of Constitution. Like many far-seeing men, Görres realised that the people who had sacrificed so much must be given some share in the government, and he did not want the mere restoration of eighteenth-century absolutism. He demanded that the will of the people should have some possibility to express itself and he was therefore in favour of the freedom of the Press. He had seen himself what power publicity could exert and he was convinced that a free Press would successfully counterbalance the dangers

which arise from the monarchical system. He denounced the practices of the secret police and urged the Government to abolish this institution which Napoleon needed but which was superfluous in a properly governed commonwealth. "Only strong nations can produce strong princes, and only those nations have been strong in all periods which have participated in the commonwealth."¹ Like so many, he had expected much of the Congress of Vienna and he was deeply disappointed when it became clear that German unity could not then be achieved. Görres' attitude to the question of German unity shows how much utopianism there was in the political thought of the German middle classes. He did not seem to realise that this problem could only be solved after the struggle for supremacy in Germany was finally decided. He desired the restitution of the old German Empire under an Austrian Emperor and he believed that the fatal dualism could be overcome by his proposal to appoint the Prussian King general of the Imperial army. It is beyond doubt that the solution of the Congress of Vienna, unsatisfactory though it was, was yet the only one which was possible in the circumstances. It was not the question of unity, however, which brought him into open conflict with the Government, it was his intrepid fight against reactionary obscurantism which induced the Government to suppress his paper. This action of the Government shows more clearly than any other that the Prussian bureaucrats did not intend to draw the middle classes into co-operation, and it is significant of the powerlessness of the liberal movement that Görres' paper disappeared as if it had never existed.

In the following year Görres published a pamphlet, *Germany and the Revolution*, in which he outlined the principles of his liberal conservatism. It is a typical Romantic product written in a heavy and obscure style and overloaded with philosophical speculation. It testifies to the enormous interest in philosophic problems that ten thousand copies were sold in one year.

¹ *Selected Works*, ed. Schellberg, vol. i, p. 564.

Görres severely criticises the reactionary attitude of the Government and voices passionately his belief in German unity. "The nation urgently demands unity," he writes, "and this demand is like the growing of a tree and the blowing of the wind, no effort can hinder its progress."¹ He again implores the Governments to introduce corporate Constitutions, which would give the people some share in the management of public affairs. The answer of the Prussian Government was the confiscation of the book and a decree ordering the arrest of its author. Görres, the champion of German nationalism, had to go into exile in Strasburg. He told himself that French liberals and conservatives alike could not understand why the Government took such drastic action against his book. The conservatives thought his constitutional plans innocuous and the liberals were surprised and dismayed at his conservative ideas. The modern reader still less understands the attitude of the Prussian authorities unless he remembers the particular circumstances in which the book appeared. It was published just after the assassination of Kotzebue, which Görres tried if not to excuse, at least to explain. The German Governments were in a state of acute nervousness and fear that the middle classes which had participated in the struggle against Napoleon would now destroy the whole structure of absolute government at home. In his greatest need the Prussian King had given the promise of a Constitution which he never intended to introduce. The Government was particularly sensitive to public opinion in the Rhineland, which had not only borne the foreign yoke but had also experienced the advantages of a progressive and modern administration.

The conflict between Görres and the Prussian Government and its consequences show two things. It reveals first the utter weakness of the middle classes which, though they had just conducted a victorious war, were unable to realise any of their demands. Germany's unity was not established, constitutions were not granted except in a few unimportant states and instead

¹ *Deutschland und die Revolution*, p. 99.

of freedom of the Press a period of darkest reaction set in. This complete failure further reveals the inaptitude of the leaders of the middle classes. Görres' merits as a herald in the struggle against Napoleon must not blind us to the fact that he was not capable of producing a political philosophy or even outlining a political programme which could have met the situation. His futile attempts to link the past with the present, his obscure philosophic constructions were useless in the fight with reaction. The Governments showed clearly enough that they were not willing to make any concessions to liberal leaders even if they paraded in the dress of conservatives. Görres once wrote proudly that his liberalism was on good terms with the Pope and the aristocrats.¹ He did not see that by this he obscured the issue and that this compromise was exactly the reason why a strong movement of the third estate was impossible in Germany. And yet he realised very clearly what was at stake. "The rulers are completely blind," he wrote, "because they do not acknowledge freedom as the basis of life."² But he did nothing for the cause of liberty and indulged in a futile hope that his propaganda for feudalism would induce the Governments to respect the rights of the people.

The political philosophy of his pamphlet on Germany and the Revolution is in no way original. He adopts wholeheartedly the organic theory from which he derives the principle of political equilibrium. Mankind, nation, and State are organisms which bloom and wither like plants. The most valuable elements of the book are those in which he describes the phenomenon of nationalism. His political ideal was that of a state in which the democratic and the monarchical elements balance each other, but he was unable to work out a constitutional system which alone would have fulfilled his ideals. He merely approached a solution of this question when he insisted on

¹ *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. viii, p. 602.

² *Selected Works*, ed. Schellberg, lxxix, cf. letter to Zeune, *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. viii, p. 489.

the self-government of the communities and demanded economic union for Germany.

After his struggle with the Prussian Government Görres gave up the fight and retreated into his studies of the history of mysticism. In 1818 he wrote that he had abandoned the present generation because it could neither endure thraldom nor gain freedom, and in 1822 he wrote to a friend, "I have put off the political rags for some time and have returned to that activity which has occupied me for years—the history of ancient sagas."¹ This time the retreat was not only temporary but was definite. He lost all sense of historic proportion; while he had always done justice to the Reformation as a necessary stage in the history of religion he now described it as the worst of all evils and denied that the Protestant states were based on lawful tradition. In future political questions interested him only if they had any connection with religious problems and he was now convinced that the problem of freedom, the ideal of his youth, was solved in the Catholic Church.

If the Classicists have been described as political sceptics, this Romantic might be called a political illusionary. This illusionism is best illustrated by the fact that he thought the Empire of Charlemagne the ideal form of the German state.² His attempt to establish a kind of conservative liberalism in Germany failed, and the future was to show that radical liberalism too had no prospects in a country where the middle classes were far from being politically educated and where they lacked clear-sighted leaders.

¹ *Works*, ed. M. Görres, vol. ix, p. 82.

² *Deutschland und die Revolution*, p. 123.

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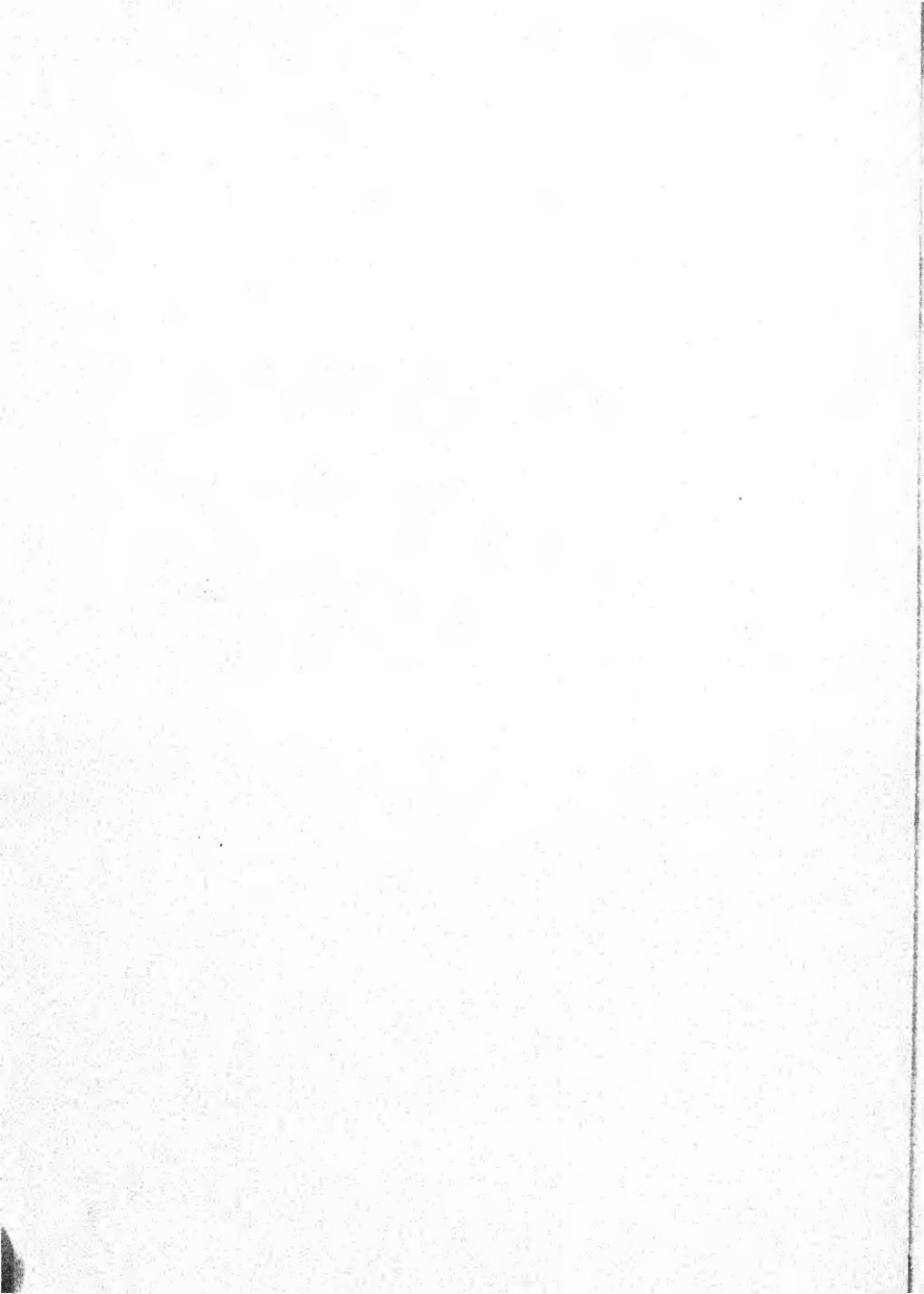
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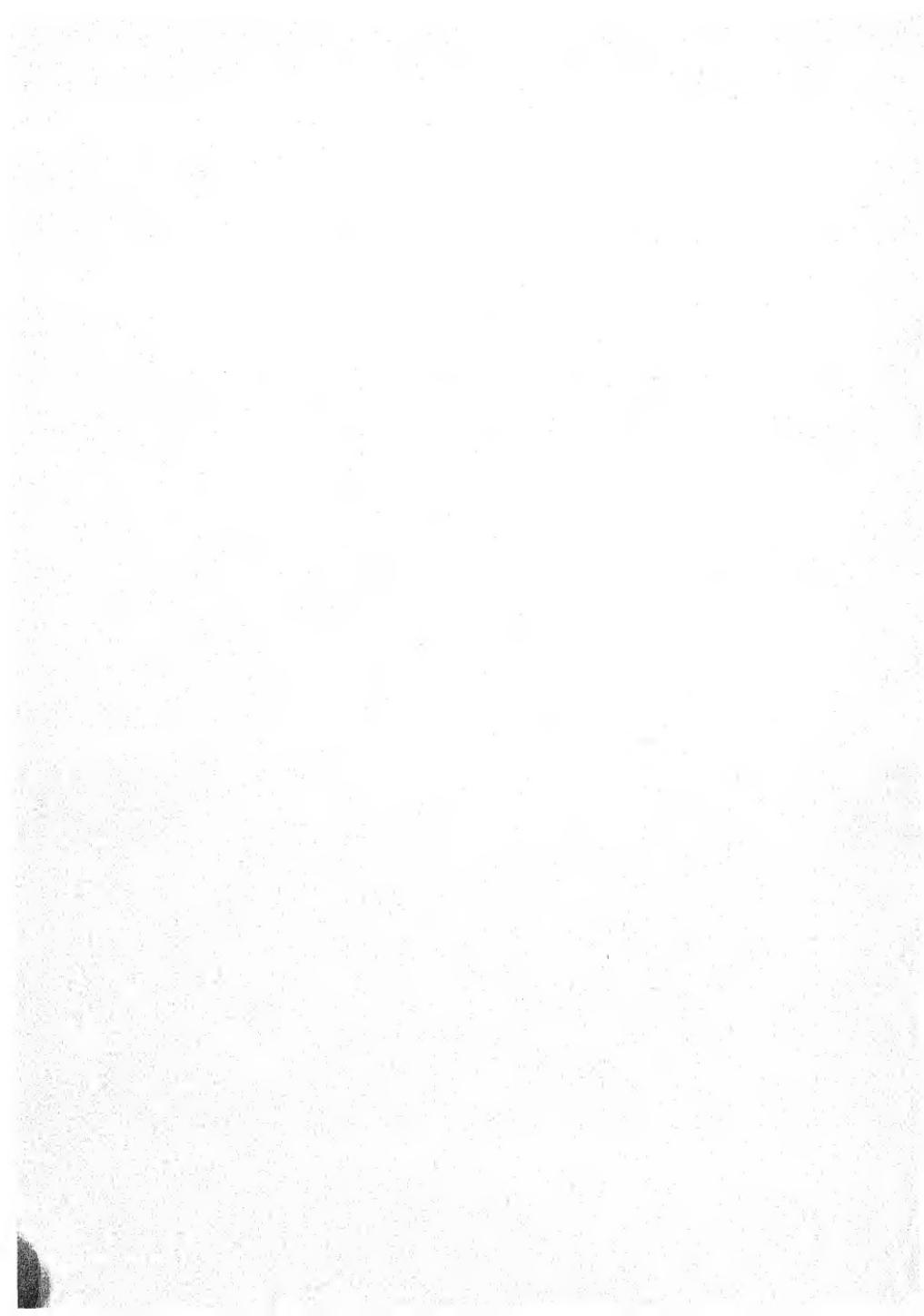
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PART III

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PRUSSIA



CHAPTER XII

FICHTE, THE NATIONALIST

FICHTE's political thought in his early periods clearly expressed the radical attitude of middle-class intellectuals who, although they had gained distinction in the field of cultural activities, remained without influence on the course of political affairs.¹ This accounts for the moralist and speculative trend of German political thought in this period. It also accounts for its dogmatism and its remoteness from political reality. Hobbes and Locke had been concerned with the justification of the existing social order of which they felt themselves to be active members, and Rousseau at least gave expression to a widespread desire for an immediate reconstruction of the body politic. The German thinkers were concerned with the definition of political questions in terms of moral postulates and they were thus inclined to overlook the fact that the problem of liberty was in the first place a political one and concerned the relation of man to man, not the relation of man to his soul. This attitude necessarily resulted in utopianism. Kant's Utopia was the moral world republic through which perpetual peace was to be ensured, Humboldt's Utopia was the State which left cultural life entirely to the individual, and Fichte summed up his politico-ethical position in his concept of a closed commercial State which was anything but a sober analysis of existing political conditions. Yet the desire of the Romantics to discover the roots of political life in the past of the nation was less "Romantic" than one is usually inclined to believe. In a sense these dreamers were nearer to reality than the rationalist thinkers who had gone through the school of the Enlightenment. Their attempts, it is true, to resuscitate out-dated forms revealed little political insight and proved futile, but their insistence on tradition as a political factor and their efforts to

¹ See *supra*, ch. iii.

establish a common German consciousness were of more lasting effect than the lofty constructions of the Idealists, with the sole exception of that of Hegel.

In his last period, in which Fichte witnessed the collapse of Prussia and lived just long enough to see the beginnings of the downfall of Napoleon, he attempted to bring his cosmopolitanism and his republicanism into unison with the awakening national forces. He had gone to Prussia in 1800 and he had soon overcome the distrust which he had felt towards that State since boyhood. He had learned to understand the particular problems and difficulties which the Prussian monarchy had to face and he sincerely endeavoured to do justice to its political system. It is beyond doubt that his connection with Prussia had a wholesome influence on his own political thought, since it widened his horizon and made him look on the political field from an angle which was no longer that of a citizen of one of the small States. The centre of German politics lay in Prussia, the country which suffered most from the fatal mistakes of the *ancien régime* and from which the movement of liberation was to start. Much of the dogmatism and utopianism of the political thinkers in Germany was due to the fact that their thought was separated from the political life of a strong and important State, and it was undeniably in Prussia that Fichte came for the first time into direct contact with political reality. All his political writings of the Prussian period reveal his continuous attempts towards greater realism and towards a true understanding of the political forces which were at work at this time.

It cannot be said, however, that these attempts were wholly successful. Fichte remained to the end the rationalist and utopian he had been when he first tackled political problems and he was not always able to distinguish clearly between what ought to be and what actually was. In this respect he remained, in spite of all his political experience, typical of a class which was still excluded from a share in the management of political affairs. The discrepancies and inconsistencies in his thought

were the clear expression of the social situation in which the German middle classes found themselves during the Napoleonic wars. In 1806 they were politically very much in the same position in which they had been during the second half of the eighteenth century and their economic and social status had not altered to any considerable extent. Their sons, it is true, had found entrance in large numbers into the service of the State and had become faithful servants of their monarchs and advocates of a progressive and enlightened policy. It was officials of this type on whom the warnings of the Revolution had not been lost and who had imbibed the teachings of Rousseau, Kant and Adam Smith. But on the whole the political thought of the leaders of the middle classes may be described as inactive liberalism which relied on the victory of reason over selfishness and political arbitrariness and remained suspicious of the State.

This generation was subjected to the hardest trial which Germany had sustained for centuries. One fact illustrates the greatness and importance of this experience: the Prussian armies which Napoleon defeated in 1806 were composed of pressed serfs, the armies which six years later drove Napoleon out of Germany were recruited from the middle classes, above all from the liberated peasantry. Fichte's wavering between eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism and modern nationalism, his efforts to replace the concept of a utopian and moralist State by the concept of a State the backbone of which was a national community, exactly mirrored the prevailing tendencies of his time, on the higher plane of the philosopher.

Fichte's place in the development of political thought in Germany has been strangely obscured by legend and by a complete misunderstanding of his ideas and intentions. This widespread Fichte legend asserts that his famous addresses to the German nation had an enormous influence on his contemporaries and that he was one of the men who helped to stir up the feverish nationalism by which Napoleon's armies were swept from German soil. This legend is widely believed not

only in Germany but also by foreign scholars, and was used during the Great War as an expedient in anti-German propaganda. According to it Fichte is the representative of an unscrupulous imperialism, the philosopher of brutal force and of the *Deutschland über alles* spirit, the man whose teachings were largely responsible for the outbreak of the Great War.¹ The fact that in his youth he was an ardent Jacobin was overlooked and his radical views explained away as immature utterances which he renounced when he came to his senses. Fichte himself was undeniably responsible to some extent for the creation of this legend since the obscurity of his style and the highly speculative method of his thought easily promote misunderstanding. But if we examine the facts and, above all, read his works in their proper context we see that his immediate influence in the struggle against Napoleon was negligible and that he had nothing to do with nineteenth-century imperialism.

Körner in his admirable essay on the effects of the *Addresses*, proved that Fichte spoke to a very small audience, that the French who occupied Berlin at the time took not the slightest notice of his oratory and that the echo of his passionate exhortations was very faint indeed.² Thus the legend of the Fichte who, disregarding immense personal danger, calls his compatriots to arms with glowing eloquence, entirely breaks down. The *Addresses* are not even effective from a literary point of view; they are heavy, obscure, and much of them must have bored his listeners considerably.

It is untrue, moreover, to assert that an irreconcilable gulf exists between Fichte the Jacobin and the man who delivered the *Addresses* in 1808. The decisive problem in Fichte's political thought, the question how liberty was to be secured, remained the same throughout his life, and in his lectures on jurisprudence which he delivered in 1812 he still taught that

¹ Cf. Engelbrecht, *Fichte*, pp. 9 and 160.

² Cf. *Forschungen zur Brandenburgischen und Preussischen Geschichte*, vol. xl, p. 65.

all men must be free and that no one must disturb the freedom of the others.¹

In one respect, however, his views had changed in accordance with the general trend of opinion of his class. The State was no longer the bogey which it had been to a generation whose immediate concern was the fight against the dangers of the absolutist system. In his *Closed Commercial State*, which almost symbolically appeared in the first year of that century which was to give the State greater power than any preceding century, Fichte had given expression to the desire of his generation for social reconstruction in and through the State. But he did not lose sight of his ultimate goal, the realisation of freedom, and he advocated a socialist system of control only because he realised that the first presupposition of a perfect civilisation was economic security for the citizen. He comforted himself with the thought that it was inevitable that force and constraint should be employed in the lower spheres of human activity in order to secure freedom in the higher sphere of morality.

He had, as it were, discovered the State as a useful expedient in his moral world, but he never went so far as to consider it as an end in itself as did his great successor Hegel. In his lectures on the fundamental traits of the age he described the State as an artificial institution in which all the forces of the individuals are directed towards the maintenance of the species. It may be noted that the individual has lost his ultimate importance, but this has not been transferred to the State but to the species. Fichte's primary concern was a religious and ethical one. The Romantic movement which he had influenced so decisively had in its turn left its marks on his mind and he developed a mystic concept of religion after he had given up his naïve and optimistic belief in the omnipotence of reason.² It is as if Fichte had become afraid of the tyrannical Ego of his first period and had fled to the protection of God of whom the

¹ *Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. iii, p. 503.

² Cf. Gogarten, *Ficht als religiöser Denker*, passim.

Ego is the image. "Everything new, great and beautiful," he summed up his religious attitude, "which since the beginning of the world has come into it and will continue to come until its end, has and will come through the idea of the divine which partly expresses itself in single selected individuals."¹

Fichte uses his religious ideas for a revaluation of his political and social views. If the idea of God or the idea of the absolute expresses itself in the individual, the latter acquires a special dignity, but he loses at the same time in importance as a mere individual. He is only a part of a greater whole and Fichte is indeed convinced that God expresses Himself in the progress of the species. To live for the species, that is, to give oneself up unselfishly for the community, becomes a religious duty and true life is the life in and for the species. Fichte even goes so far as to deny that the single individual exists, he exists only in a metaphysical sense as a part of the species.² We must however bear in mind that this subjection of the individual to the whole is not meant in the sense in which modern nationalists would understand it. The whole to which the individual submits is not the national State, but an ideal form of civilisation in which the ultimate goal of mankind, liberty and the undisputed rule of the moral law, is reached or at least approached. The State is only useful as a stepping-stone towards this ideal and it is inevitable since men unfortunately are not willing to submit voluntarily to the rule of the moral law. If all individuals realised that perfect morality could be achieved by subjection to the moral laws, no State would be required.³ It is noteworthy that Fichte assigns to the State the right to employ force, but he sees in the State only the form of the idea, not like Hegel, the idea itself. The State, that is to say, is not the immediate incarnation of the divine, but only the presupposition without which man cannot fulfil God's will.

In his lectures on the fundamental traits of the age, delivered in 1804 and 1805, he launched a strong attack against the

¹ See Wallner, *Fichte als politischer Denker*, p. 146.

² *Works*, vol. vii, pp. 37, 38.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

spirit of the Enlightenment. Like so many of his generation he was disgusted with the prevailing spirit of selfishness and superficiality, and in an ambitious philosophic construction of history he denounces his age as the period of complete sinfulness in which the rule of instinct and obedience to authority had been replaced by a reckless belief in experience and by utter selfishness.¹ This was a curiously correct transcription of the political situation, though his denunciation of the period as one of sinfulness met with strong criticism. The belief in authority had indeed disappeared, at least as far as the intellectuals were concerned, and had given way to an optimistic belief in the power of reason to reorganise society. Fichte, who had given up this belief in his *Closed Commercial State* as far as it affected the economic sphere, discards it entirely in his analysis of the spirit of his age and stresses the necessity for beginning afresh through education. In this he expresses one of the strongest tendencies of this period, a period remarkable for the reforms which were carried out in the sphere of public education. The middle classes were still far from realising the part they were to play in politics, but they were driven by an instinctive desire to raise their intellectual standard so that they would be able to participate in public life. In Fichte's educational ideal there is a strong democratic element; he demands, for instance, education for all citizens without exception. He even overcomes objections put forward by dogmatic liberals such as Humboldt and grants the State the right of compelling parents to give their children an adequate education. In this he exercised a considerable influence on the development of public education in Prussia. He was in accordance with the political opinion of the middle class in believing that his educational scheme could be easily financed if the State would give up the costly instrument of a standing army. The standing army was in the eyes of those who stood for progress the embodiment of absolutism.

It was natural that the demand for education should be

¹ Cf. *Works*, vol. vii, p. 23.

raised with particular insistence by men who, like Fichte, had learned from personal experience that education opened the way not only to careers but also to a deeper understanding of life. The educational problem became the keynote of Fichte's writings and his famous addresses to the nation were really a comprehensive dissertation on the question how public education ought to be organised and what results would follow from a wise educational policy. When Fichte delivered these lectures in 1808, there remained very little for a man who wanted to take part in public affairs to do except to exhort his fellow-countrymen to improve their intellectual standard.¹ Napoleon had routed the German armies, his officials had taken over the administration of practically the whole country and their financial demands on the citizens were almost unbearable. If the French, whose spies swarmed over the country, took no notice of Fichte's orations, it showed that they underrated the moral forces to which Fichte appealed. These forces, however, existed, above all in the middle classes, who perhaps for the first time felt a deep attachment to the monarchy and to their incapable king. Napoleon's belated attempts to reconstruct the universal monarchy of the Middle Ages on a modern scale was bound to fail since he disregarded the essential fact that the European nations were on the point of forming themselves into strong and independent-minded nations, a movement which Napoleon himself did much to stimulate.

Fichte's attitude to the national question is oscillating and reveals the transitional character of this period. In his lectures on the essential traits of the age he still professed his cosmopolitan attitude. His philosophy of history led him to the belief that the aim of mankind is to secure the rule of reason and morality in the world, not in any particular national state.

¹ Cf. the following characteristic passage: "Unsere Verfassungen wird man uns machen, unsere Bündnisse und die Anwendung unserer Streitkräfte wird man uns anzeigen, ein Gesetzbuch wird man uns leihen, selbst Gericht und Urteilsspruch und die Ausübung desselben wird man uns zuweilen abnehmen; mit diesen Sorgen werden wir auf die nächste Zukunft verschont bleiben. Bloss an die Erziehung hat man nicht gedacht-suchen wir ein Geschäft, so lasst uns dieses ergreifen." *Works*, vol. vii, p. 433.

From this he deduced that the true fatherland of the Christian European is that country which stands at the height of civilisation.¹ He even talked contemptuously of those who see their fatherland in the country in which they happen to be born, instead of following the ideal of liberty and the light of civilisation. It was for this reason that he extolled the German nation as the philosophic people who bore the torch of civilisation. In his opinion there was no fundamental contrast between the cosmopolitan and the patriotic attitudes. Rather they were different aspects of the same thing. "Cosmopolitanism is the will to attain the purpose of life and of man in all mankind," he wrote in the *Patriotic Dialogues*, "patriotism is the will to attain this purpose first of all in that nation of which we are members and the wish that this light may radiate from this nation over all mankind."² We notice that cosmopolitanism and patriotism are not political attitudes, but philosophic viewpoints which complement one another. Though as late as 1806 Fichte clung to the uncompromising cosmopolitanism of his youth, in the second dialogue which he wrote one year later after the war had been lost, his position had been considerably altered. The defeat of Prussia inevitably brought home to him the intimate relation between State and individual as a real empirical problem from which there was no escape into philosophic constructions, and his task was now to reconcile this experience with his fundamental philosophic attitude. In this second dialogue he suddenly seemed to grasp the full truth of the assertion put forward by Herder and the Romantics that each state was an individual representation of the divine with characteristics which distinguished and separated it from other states. The possibility of German political unity dawned on him. So far he had, like most thinkers of the Enlightenment, been inclined to believe that the political division of Germany was an asset rather than a drawback to her cultural development. He was not able, however, to develop his thought along these lines and to work out the concept of a strong national German

¹ *Works*, vol. vii, p. 212.

² *Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. iii, p. 228 ff.

state, since he was still at heart more concerned with the ideal perfect state. His peculiar solution of this dilemma was the glorification of the German nation as the philosophic nation. Nothing perhaps is more characteristic of German political thought than this over-valuation of philosophy. Fichte was convinced that he was one of the few who had truly understood Kant and that his own philosophy furnished man, especially the Germans, with an explanation of reality and a remedy for all difficulties.¹ The old optimism of the rationalists reveals itself when he teaches that it is possible to educate the people to such an extent that they would be able to grasp his philosophy, and by developing into reasonable and moral beings to reach the goal of freedom. That the Germans are the philosophic nation *par excellence* is shown by the very fact that they have invented the terminology of philosophy and that their language is the only modern one which has kept its form pure. In his *Addresses* he proceeds to eulogise the Germans with glowing eloquence and it is this enthusiasm which has caused so much misunderstanding and resentment. Critics have forgotten that he did not infer from this belief in the mission of Germany that she ought to rule the world or to suppress other nations. On the contrary he expressly denounced all efforts to imitate England and her colonial empire, and it was in the cultivation of science and philosophy that he saw Germany's particular task and contribution to civilisation. Although he had learned to realise that his Closed Commercial State was a Utopia, he still demanded in his later writings that Germany should keep aloof from international trade as far as possible.² Fichte's critics, moreover, did not notice that his ideas did not dwell at all on the political plane, and that the German nation which he extolled was simply an idealistic chimera with very little relation to political reality. Fichte, it is true, had come nearer to the facts when he realised that the German people belonged together, but his concept of unity still applied only to the cultural sphere. He ridiculed the idea of a particularist Prussian

¹ *Works*, vol. vii, p. 581.

² Cf. *Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. ii, p. 587.

patriotism and he tried to solve the intricate problem which the relation between Prussia and the Empire offered by stating that true Prussian patriotism was nothing but German patriotism. He urged that Prussia should take the lead in the struggle for German unity, for he realised that the Austrian emperor who ruled also over non-German territories would be inclined to use the forces of Germany for the furtherance of his particular ends. In this Fichte revealed a remarkable insight into the problems with which the German statesmen of his time were faced.¹

In one essay which he wrote in Königsberg in 1807, he seems to have come nearest to a realistic conception of a national state as an organisation of the national forces for the sake of self-assertion against other nations. This essay is an interesting attempt to rehabilitate Machiavelli, who had been in disgrace during the whole of the eighteenth century, and it is noteworthy that Fichte uses the same arguments which were later to be put forward by Macaulay in his brilliant essay on the same subject. Fichte is far from exonerating Machiavelli from the charge of immorality, but like Macaulay he tries to explain his attitude by pointing out that Machiavelli can only be judged by the moral standards and political exigencies of his own time. In this Fichte reveals a historical realism which distinguishes him favourably from most of the historians of the Enlightenment. While Fichte condemns Machiavelli's moral standpoint, or rather his insensibility to moral issues, he agrees with him in one essential point. He is convinced "that everyone who wishes to organise a republic, or any state for that matter, must assume the maliciousness of man."² This seems to be in strange contrast with Fichte's belief in humanity and he hastens to add that it does not matter whether man is really malicious if only, as it were as a matter of precaution, the State is built on that assumption. Fichte had increasingly come to realise that if law is to be secured, men must be compelled to abide by it, and in this he had replaced the utopian liberalism of his

¹ Cf. *Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. iii, p. 233.

² *Ibid.*, p. 420.

early period by a more realistic appreciation of the political situation. At the same time he had grown more and more despondent at the weakness and moral indifference of his generation and he came to think that a dose of Machiavellism would be a useful antidote. When he praised Machiavelli, he intended to criticise implicitly the wavering and spineless policy which the Prussian statesmen had pursued since the death of Frederick the Great. But he faithfully adheres to the fundamentals of his liberal attitude and demands, as expressed in his earliest writings, that in his private life the prince should be bound by the moral law and that he should treat his subjects according to law and statute. The doctrines of the rights of man and of the original equality of all human beings are still in his opinion "the eternal and unshakable principles of all social orders against which no state must infringe."¹

Once again he denounces the feudal doctrine according to which the nation is the personal property of the prince, and he raises the demand for the abolition of privileges. If he reluctantly admits the necessity for constraint, he wishes that this constraint should be brought to bear on all in equal measure. It is characteristic of the change in his outlook that he no longer justifies the abolition of privileges on moral grounds, but on the ground that it is the essential presupposition for a strong state. He realises that as long as there are privileges there will be division and waste of strength.² He shows a true appreciation of political reality when he emphasises the fact that inequality of rights hinders people from being law-abiding.³ Thus nationalist and socialist ideas are linked up for the first time in German political thought and it is this part of his thought which strongly influenced socialists such as Lassalle and to some extent also the leaders of present-day Germany.

It is of great importance that Fichte believes that Machiavelli was perfectly right as far as the relations of states to one another

¹ *Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. iii, p. 428.

² *Works*, vol. vii, p. 219.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

are concerned. While Fichte is convinced that in his own time the rule of law inside the State had been secured, he points to the anarchy which prevails in the foreign relations of the states. Fichte does not even share the opinion of the teachers of Natural Law that these foreign relations are controlled by the law of nature, he is convinced that in this sphere only the right of the stronger is valid.¹ Thus Fichte dealt the final blow to the concept of Natural Law and pointed the way to the modern concept of the national state, the basis of which is power. Fichte himself did not follow up this idea and reverted in his later writings to his concept of the ideal state towards which the German nation state was only a stepping-stone. His essay on Machiavelli is an illuminating example for a phenomenon which frequently occurs in the history of political thought: the philosopher anticipates historical development by putting forward ideas which transcend the prevailing conditions and from which he himself recoils. Napoleon's attempt to establish a new universal empire revealed the weakness of the eighteenth-century policy of balance of power, and his collapse showed the strength of the national tendency, but in 1807 the time was not yet ripe for a reorganisation of Europe on national lines.

That Fichte clung to his republican ideas is shown by his lectures on political science which he delivered in 1812 and by his comment on the famous manifesto which the King of Prussia issued in 1813. In these writings he endeavoured to reconcile his democratic views with the necessity for strong leadership if the war against Napoleon was to be successful. He emphasised the fact that this war was not like those of former centuries in which princes engaged for the sake of the aggrandisement of their territories, but was a true war of the people waged for the sake of liberty. His denunciation of Napoleon is particularly interesting; he considered him as a representative of the principle of slavery and maintained that his worst crime was to have betrayed the ideals of the Revolution. In this Fichte

¹ *Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. iii, p. 427.

differed from reactionaries such as Metternich and Gentz who saw in Napoleon simply the inevitable consequence of the Revolution. If, however, we read Fichte's judgment on Napoleon carefully, we notice the hidden admiration which the philosopher of the will cherished for this man of gigantic will-power.

It was particularly the liberals, men like Heine and Börne, who later professed an enthusiastic admiration for Napoleon, and it might seem strange that thinkers who advocated a free government should look on him as their idol. In the case of Heine and Börne this attitude is partly explained by the fact that both were Jews and that Napoleon did much for the emancipation of their race. In reality, however, the reasons for the liberal attitude were deeper. Apart from some professional enthusiasts and self-seeking fawners there were many who realised that the old system could be overcome only by a strong blast from without, and these people were genuinely impressed by the liberal measures such as the complete abolition of feudal rights which Napoleon actually introduced wherever he gained control. This explains the glorification of Napoleon which we meet in countless publications of the period and which would otherwise be completely inexplicable, even if we take into account the lack of a national consciousness, which arose only after years of suppression.

Later liberals were particularly inclined to extol Napoleon because they lived to see how reaction lifted its head everywhere after his collapse. Fichte died too soon to see his warnings and demands put aside. He was spared the humiliation of seeing that his *Addresses* were put on the Index as a dangerous and seditious book. We do not know what course he would have taken in the struggle against the reaction, but we know that the attitude of the reactionary government was in flat contradiction to anything he had wished and thought. In his comment on the king's manifesto he had made it clear enough that his ideal was a republic and that he saw in the king merely a necessary evil, required to force the people to

abide by the law and to educate them to become free. He would no doubt have been horrified to see how the king disregarded the law and did not fulfil his promises. One thing nevertheless seems certain: even if Fichte had lived to see the reaction, he would not have fought actively against it any more than Schleiermacher or any other representatives of middle-class thought were prepared to do. In any case, he could not have succeeded since the forces on which he could have relied were too small. In 1813 the prospects of German liberalism were very gloomy indeed. The intellectual spokesmen of the middle classes still devoted more attention to moral problems and utopian constructions than to practical political issues, and the masses who had been divorced from politics for centuries were unable to take the initiative in the struggle for reform. Only a revolutionary struggle could have secured their effective participation in the governmental system. This would have required a revolution such as England underwent in the seventeenth and France in the eighteenth century. Both these revolutions were carried out by a strong and politically conscious middle class which was lacking in Germany.

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CHAPTER XIII

STEIN AND HIS COLLABORATORS

THE importance of the part which Baron vom Stein played in the development of political thought in Germany is best illustrated by the fierce controversy which German scholars have waged as to whether he was a liberal or a conservative.¹ This controversy, strange and inexplicable as it may seem on first view, shows that liberals and conservatives alike feel themselves indebted to his thought, and indeed both make out a strong case when they claim Stein for their respective political camps. In reality, as we may say from the outset, Stein was neither a liberal nor a conservative, though the whole development of these two parties would have been almost impossible without him. The controversy, however, would never have arisen had there been in Stein's time a clearly defined liberal movement or even a liberal party. The very terms liberal and conservative were not coined until after the collapse of Napoleon² and there was yet very little sign of parties with definite political programmes in Germany. A liberal party was not formed until after the war of liberation in the parliaments of the south German states, and the conservative party was not founded till after 1848. These parties were middle class parties and could only come into existence after these classes had attained sufficient political consciousness and had reached a fairly high social standard.³ The middle classes

¹ This controversy finds expression in Lehmann's biography of Stein and Ernst von Meier's attacks on this work in his book *Preussen und die Französische Revolution*. At present, of course, no German historian would dare to admit that Stein was influenced by liberal ideas.

² The term liberal came from Spain in about 1820 and the word conservative was a happy expression used by Chateaubriand and introduced into European politics at about the same time. Schnabel, *Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. ii, p. 18.

³ In England also the party system underwent decisive changes under the influence of the middle classes. It is no accident that Robert Peel, the founder

in Prussia were so far from playing any part in political life that it was one of the tasks with which the Prussian reformers were confronted to draw them into co-operation and to make them interested in the problems of government. Stein has been so conspicuous among German statesmen and his reforms have always been considered of such vital importance precisely because he tried to secure the co-operation of the middle classes, a co-operation which was to characterise political life of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The foundation of the liberal and conservative parties as definite organisations falls outside the scope of this study, but we must state briefly how far their aims were related to and in what way they differed from those tendencies which we have called liberal or conservative in the foregoing chapters. The parties of the nineteenth century which professed these two creeds distinguished themselves from earlier tendencies of similar description in that they were primarily concerned with the struggle for power in a strong and centralised state. In this respect they reveal their dependence on the experience of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic epilogue.¹ On the other hand, the conservative movement as it existed before the Revolution and as it was represented, for instance, by Möser, was strongly opposed to the absolutist state and wanted to maintain the old feudal order with its atomistic structure, while the liberal movement as represented by Kant and Fichte cherished a humanitarian and abstract ideal of freedom which was just as atomistic, though these thinkers strove to destroy through it the feudal foundations of society. In this respect the liberal thinkers and politicians found allies even amongst the enlightened absolutist princes who had gradually destroyed the predominance of the nobility in order to secure their own undisputed sovereignty. It is for this reason that the

of the modern conservative party, was one of the first men of the middle class to lead English politics. In Germany, though the bulk of the conservative party consisted of members of the bourgeoisie, the leadership remained in the hands of the nobility.

¹ Cf. Wahl, *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. civ, p. 544.

enlightened princes chose many of their officials from the ranks of the educated bourgeoisie. The close alliance between throne and conservative forces, which was to determine German politics so decisively, was primarily a work of the nineteenth century, while during the same period the liberal movement threw off a radical democratic branch. This transition from individualistic to democratic views has been illustrated by the development of Fichte's thought.

The humanitarian liberalism of the close of the eighteenth century was an offshoot of the movement of the Enlightenment on to which the ideas of 1789 had been grafted. Thus it is not surprising that there was in Prussia, whose greatest king had been a representative of the Enlightenment, a large number of officials who were imbued with the liberal spirit and intent on reforms. Most of these reformers were men of the middle class or sons of newly ennobled families who carried out important and far-reaching reforms long before the impact of Napoloen necessitated a complete reconstruction of Prussia. The serfs on the royal domains, for example, were liberated years before the issue of the famous decree of October 1807, by which all peasants were set free.

The greatness of this reconstruction is revealed by the fact that whereas before 1806 Prussia was an agglomerate of scattered territories belonging to the royal house of the Hohenzollern, by 1813 it had been integrated into a strong state which counted as one of the Great Powers of Europe.¹ It is obvious that a strong and centralised state presupposed a certain unity and homogeneity amongst its citizens. Until 1806 such homogeneity was entirely lacking. There was not only a rigid division between classes but also one between town and country, thus preventing the citizens from making contact with one another. Trade and handicrafts were concentrated in the towns and their establishment in the country was strictly forbidden. It was very difficult for a wealthy tradesman to

¹ The State was not called Prussia until 1807; hitherto it had been referred to as "all the provinces and lands of His Royal Majesty."

become a landed proprietor¹ and impossible for a nobleman to go into trade or to set up in industrial enterprise. The towns which during the Middle Ages had flourished as independent communities had lost even the last remnants of self-government and were considered by the absolute kings as objects of fiscal exploitation. The guilds which inside the walls of the town had played a prominent part in the administration of public affairs had degenerated into organisations which crippled progress and furthered corruption.

In addition the Prussian kings, above all Frederick the Great, treated the different parts of their realm not as parts of one united kingdom but as fortuitous possessions of which they neglected some and preferred others. Thus Frederick the Great had no interest in his western possessions in which the old feudal constitution with a healthy peasantry had remained more or less intact, and he preferred his eastern provinces in which the political prerogatives of the nobility and of the towns had been wholly destroyed and the nobles had found a substitute for their lost political power in complete domination over their serfs.

The social and political structure of Prussia had been determined for more than a century by military necessities. The Prussian princes knew that they could hold together their separated possessions only with a strong army. Since Prussia was, in comparison with France and England, a poor country, it had to spend a disproportionate part of its national income on military equipment in order to maintain a high political standard inside the Empire and in Europe.² This state of affairs

¹ He needed the consent of the king for the acquisition of an estate.

² The following table illustrates the financial position of Prussia with regard to military expenditure:

In 1740 (accession of Frederick II to the throne) the public income amounted to 7,145,859 thalers,

of which were spent on military purposes, 5,346,017 thalers.

In 1786 (death of Frederick II) the corresponding figures are 19,341,345 thalers and 12,612,513 thalers.

In 1797 (accession of Frederick William III) the corresponding figures are 18,145,235 thalers and 13,987,435 thalers.

[Continued opposite]

had compelled Frederick the Great, while he furthered and facilitated trade, to tax it heavily at the same time, and since the chief taxes were levied in the towns it was understandable that trade in the country was discountenanced. On the other hand the serf system seemed particularly fitted to furnish the army with soldiers, and the complete allegiance of the nobles was bought by the prerogatives which they enjoyed on their estates and in the army. Thus sovereignty, as Frederick William I expressed it, seemed to have been established on a *rocher de bronze*, but in reality the absolutist system had reached a deadlock. Its domination over the nobles was only apparent since the nobles did on their estates what they liked and the citizens in the towns were deeply estranged from the Crown.

It was no wonder that a state like this should collapse under the impact of a modern state such as France under Napoleon, rather it was surprising that this weak institution should have been able to survive for so long. There can be no doubt that Stein's vital reforms, prepared though they were by public opinion and the work of a number of far-seeing officials, would never have succeeded had the disaster of 1806 not cruelly exposed the weakness of the old order, frightened the incapable king into submission and paralysed the resistance of the reactionary forces.¹ Stein's greatness consists in the fact that he took up the immense challenge of defeat with unusual vigour and foresight.

Stein was not a political thinker in the genuine sense of the word. His was essentially a practical mind, and like Möser he disliked generalisations and was suspicious of theories. He had a strong respect for tradition and was convinced that it was best to link up reforms as far as possible with existing institutions. He was almost entirely unaffected by the great

In 1806 (Battle of Jena) the corresponding figures are 25,060,562 thalers and 17,185,112 thalers.

—A. F. Riedel, *Der Brandenburgische Preussische Staatshaushalt*, Berlin, 1866, *passim*.

¹ The reform of Prussia in 1807 is one of the most striking corroborations of Professor Toynbee's theory of challenge and response as factors in the development of civilisations. Cf. *The Study of History*, vol. ii, p. 105.

literary movement of his time; his library shows that he read few novels and no poetry, and even Goethe's genius remained alien to him. None of the politicians of his age was so little influenced and impressed by the thought of the great German philosophers. He was chiefly interested in history and it is not one of his smallest feats that he inaugurated the official collection of the documents of the history of Germany. In this deep interest in history he differed from thinkers such as Kant and Fichte, and he mirrored the strong tendency of the time which was initiated by Möser and Herder and culminated in the Romantic movement. Yet Stein was not a Romantic, though he was strongly influenced by Herder and had many ideas in common with Möser. He shared with the Romantics their reverence for the Middle Ages and their desire for a resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire. Like them he was inclined to glorify mediaeval customs and to deplore the fact that the glamour of the Empire of the Hohenstaufen had departed. He even found fault with the Reformation as one of the chief causes of German disunity, though he himself never dreamt of leaving the Protestant religion.¹ And yet his attitude towards political problems was very far from that of the Romantics. For the Romantics the Empire was chiefly an object of aesthetic enthusiasm, whereas for Stein it was a real political problem. The veneration of the Romantics for the Middle Ages was a flight from the "disenchanted present," for Stein it was the continuation of a living tradition. When the Romantics glorified the nobility they revealed that they had lost contact with their own class and were trying to appease their sense of social inferiority, whereas Stein's belief in the nobility was an expression of self-confidence. Stein's thought grew out of the tradition of a family who had lived on the same spot for seven centuries, the thought of the Romantics sprang of a yearning for tradition as an antidote against their restlessness and over-sensitiveness.

In many ways Stein resembled Burke, for whom he felt

¹ Cf. *Briefwechsel*, vol. iii, p. 553.

the deepest admiration and who influenced his outlook to no small extent. He shared with him the belief in tradition and the conviction that the State was more than an artificial institution to promote industry. Like Burke he was convinced that things must grow organically and that nothing can endure which has not its roots in the past.¹ Stein admired in Burke the representative of the political system of England which he had first learned to see through the eyes of Montesquieu, the thinker to whom he owed most.

German historians such as Treitschke have hailed Stein as the first man who conceived of a strong and united Germany as it was later to be created by Bismarck. This, however, is not the case. One could just as well assert that Burke conceived of the modern democratic parliamentary system in England. Stein's attitude towards the Empire was essentially determined by the social status of his family. He was an Imperial knight, that is to say, he belonged to one of those families which were independent of any particular power within the Empire and were only responsible to the Emperor himself. Towards the end of the Holy Roman Empire, when most of the towns had lost their independence and the vassal states had become virtually sovereign, these knights had been the only supporters of the Imperial idea in Germany and they thus kept alive the ideal of German unity. They were the only class in Germany which saw in the Empire not the ruin of a once splendid edifice, but the only possible form for Germany's political life. "The Imperial Knighthood," in the words of Seeley, "supplied the place of a class which was too proud to serve and at the same time was not admitted into the caste of absolute princes."²² Ulrich von Hutten and Franz von Sickingen, perhaps the two most famous Imperial knights besides Stein,

¹ Cf. the following passage from a memorandum which he wrote in 1816: "Soll eine Verfassung gebildet werden, so muss sie geschichtlich werden, wir müssen sie nicht erfinden, wir müssen sie erneuern, ihre Elemente in den ersten Zeiten der Entstehung unseres Volkes aufsuchen und aus diesen sie entwickeln." *Staatschriften*, ed. Thimme, p. 152.

² Seeley, *Life and Times of Stein*, vol. i, p. 15.

had tried in the sixteenth century to bring about an alliance between the free towns and the orders of the knights in order to resist the growing absolutism and to help the Emperor in keeping down the particularist powers. They failed because the religious division and the economic necessities worked in favour of the member states. It was in their spirit that Stein fought against the absolutism of the small German states, that he worked for municipal self-government and tried to re-establish the glorious Empire. Stein's hatred and contempt of the German princes is almost unbounded.¹ His writings are full of invective against them and it was in this connection that Stein displayed his remarkable lack of diplomacy, a trait which has been such a common characteristic of German statesmen. Stein's attempts failed like those of Hutten and Sickingen because the foundations of the Holy Roman Empire were more than ever undermined.

Stein's political convictions were formed in Göttingen, where the last great constitutional lawyers of the Empire, such as Pütter, taught and where he came into close contact with English ideas. Rehberg's political views appealed to his historical sense, and Stein owed much of his knowledge of English institutions to his friendship with him. Rehberg and his circle were convinced that reforms in Germany were only possible when carried out from above, but it was exactly for this reason that they urged the necessity for reforms the more strongly. Rehberg demanded above all a reform of the nobility and the liberation of the peasants. Stein heartily agreed with his friend's criticism of the absolutist system, though he soon realised that Rehberg was a typical product of the Enlightenment and had very little understanding for the national question. Yet the influence of this Göttingen circle upon him was very great and it formed an efficient counter-weight against the ideas of the French thinkers. Stein knew the doctrine of the physiocrats, from whom he had learned much, and his

¹ Cf. for instance, *Briefwechsel*, vol. iv, p. 121, where he calls the German princes "Lumpengesindel."

reforms can indeed in many ways be compared with those of Turgot. French thought, however, was primarily concerned with a strong and centralised state for the sake of economic efficiency, whereas Rehberg and Stein wanted to adapt the old feudal order to modern needs and secure the freedom of the individual through the corporation to which he historically belonged.

It might seem strange that Stein offered his services not to the Emperor but to Prussia, the most powerful of the vassal states. He realised, however, that Germany could not be united without Prussia, whose great king he deeply admired. In this Stein showed acute political insight, but his fatal error consisted in his sanguine belief that Prussia and Austria could jointly lead the German Empire.

For the first decades of his career Stein worked in that western part of Prussia which was to become the centre of the immense industrial development of the nineteenth century. In this province Stein encountered a sound peasantry and a nobility which had not yet lost its ancient right to share in the administration of the country. This experience increased Stein's preference for the feudal constitution on a broad basis. Nothing was more abhorrent to him than the feudal system as it existed in France under the *ancien régime* and in parts of Germany where the noblemen took no part in the political life of the commonwealth and contented themselves with exploiting their serfs as a compensation for their surrender of political power to the Crown. Stein was in favour of an independent peasantry and a nobility which was not rigidly secluded from other classes but admitted wealthy landowners of the middle class into their order. He wished that all the property-owning classes should take part in the administration through the medium of their corporations which, as in the Middle Ages, should have the right to advise the king in matters of legislation and without whose consent taxes could not be levied. Stein desired the collaboration of the middle classes because they are, as he expressed it, "in all civilised

countries the preservers of knowledge, of customs and of the wealth of the people."¹

It can easily be seen that such reforms inevitably involved a fierce struggle on the one hand with the absolute power which did not want to give up any of its rights, and on the other with the nobility which wanted to maintain the feudal order of the *ancien régime*. Therefore it seems as if Stein was fighting on the same ground as the liberals, who also endeavoured to curb the excesses of absolutism and of the nobility. But in reality their outlook and their aims were vastly different. Liberty, as the liberals conceived it, was the abstract liberty of the rights of man, developed by the teachers of Natural Law; liberty, as Stein understood it, was the traditional and guaranteed rights of the corporations extended and amplified by his reforms. The liberals demanded equality in the name of a philosophic theory of justice; Stein was convinced that equality was impossible and that all must be made to collaborate in the commonwealth according to their different social status as it had historically developed. Under the influence of physiocratic theories, however, Stein demanded that the inequality must not be too great if a social and political equilibrium was to be maintained.

In one point, it is true, Stein's attitude seemed to resemble that of the liberal middle class intellectuals. He realised long before the disaster of 1806 that the State needed the faithful allegiance of the propertied middle classes, and he hoped that this allegiance would be secured if they were drawn into co-operation and given the opportunity of associating with the nobility. This entailed a thorough reform in the status of the nobility, which had to give up many of its prerogatives and was forced to enter into competition with able members of the bourgeoisie. It is no wonder that the nobles deeply resented Stein's reforms and accused him of Jacobinism. Stein, however, had nothing in common with that hatred of nobility which was so widespread after the French Revolution.

¹ Huch, *Stein*, p. 88.

His ideal, like that of Möser, was the state of affairs which prevailed in England, where the younger sons of noblemen became members of families which were successful in trade and industry and where the wealthy members of the middle class took part in municipal and national politics.

Stein never wanted to abolish nobility entirely as did some of his collaborators such as Vincke and Schön, he wanted to reform it and to base it not on privileges but on merits.¹ It is perhaps one of the greatest tragedies in German history that Stein did not succeed in this attempt. He had, however, a deep contempt for one section of the nobility, the Prussian Junkers, who obstructed all reforms and displayed a superciliousness and class consciousness from which Stein himself was wholly free. It is a deep irony that it was a member of this class who was to achieve the task of German unity along lines entirely different from those followed by Stein.

Stein was aware of the fact that the future lay with industrial progress, and that this progress could only come about if the economic system of the country was freed from all the fetters which had hitherto encumbered it. Thus he strove to abolish the innumerable duties which prevented trade even between one province and another and he did his best to improve roads and canals in order to facilitate commerce. Again this has been used as evidence for Stein's liberal attitude. It has been said that he was a pupil of Adam Smith and a follower of the *laissez-faire* theory. We know from his annotations in the copy of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* which he used that he studied Smith very carefully, but to say that he was a pupil of Smith's would be an over-statement.² Stein was too much of an empiricist to be carried away by any theory, and it is interesting that it was on this account that he was severely criticised by the theoretical liberal Schön who was convinced that Smith offered the panacea for the suffering world. Stein agreed with Smith when the latter wrote: "I believe that the work done by freemen

¹ Cf. *Staatschriften*, ed. Thimme, p. 154.

² Cf. Botzenhart, *Die Bibliothek des Freiherrn vom Stein*, *passim*.

comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves.' Stein underlined the passage in which Smith pointed out that the security of every society always depends on the martial spirit of the great body of the people.¹ His theory of the State, however, differs widely from that of Adam Smith. Smith approaches political problems from the point of view of the economist, Stein from that of the man who believes in tradition as the basis of politics. In Stein's political theory, moreover, there is a strong religious element and thus the chief end of the State, in his opinion, is not the production of food or the increase of economic welfare, but religious, moral and political perfection.²

Fundamentally, it did not matter so much to Stein that the labour of the freemen was cheaper, he condemned slavery and serfdom primarily because they were in his opinion immoral and could not be suffered in a state which ought to realise moral perfection. Smith, in consequence of his liberal attitude, was opposed to entailed estates; Stein was in favour of them because he thought they would strengthen family spirit and maintain tradition. Smith was in favour of free trade, Stein advocated a policy of control and guidance through the State. The difference on this point, however, was not so very great, for Smith demanded free trade only in such states as were economically fully developed, and it was beyond doubt that this could not be said of Prussia, which was economically still very backward.

The results of Stein's reforms show how strongly economic necessities determine the extent and the effects of reforms and even thwart the original intentions of the reformers. Stein's attitude towards the guilds furnished a striking example of this. The guilds in the Middle Ages had been the backbone of the political and social life in the towns and one of the strongest factors in the corporative organisation of society. It is for this reason that Möser wished to maintain them and that the Romantics made a sentimental propaganda in their

¹ Cf. Botzenhart, *Die Bibliothek des Freiherrn vom Stein*, p. 354.

² *Briefwechsel*, vol. v, p. 621.

favour. Stein with his avowed preference for the corporative organisation of society had therefore a deep sympathy with this institution. Yet it was he who initiated that movement by which the guilds were broken up and complete liberty of trade was introduced. Again Stein seemed to be in line with the liberal thinkers who believed the guilds to be one of the most obstinate barriers to freedom and equality in the political sphere and to progress and prosperity in the economic sphere. Representatives of orthodox liberalism such as Schön demanded their radical abolition. On account of his attitude towards the guilds, which he theoretically favoured but in practice helped to destroy, Stein has been accused of inconsistency. He certainly could have avoided this apparent inconsistency if he had been a systematic thinker who dislikes to act if his actions are not in accordance with his fundamental beliefs. If we look more closely, we find that Stein was by no means inconsistent. His chief aim was to bridge the gulf between individual and State which absolutism had created. For this he deemed the co-operation of the citizens through the groups to which they naturally belonged absolutely necessary. Stein knew just as well as the liberal critics of the guild system that the guilds were no longer capable of performing their social function. At a time when industry was beginning to develop and mechanical labour to supersede skilled handicraft, their organisations had degenerated into private associations whose aim was no longer to protect the high standard of their respective crafts, but to keep out competition and to hinder technical progress, quite apart from the fact that the growing specialisation made the whole system more and more unwieldy and over-organised. The guild system had for instance the absurd result that the members of the professions, who for obvious reasons could not be organised and who were often the most intelligent members of the community, took no part in municipal life. The abolition of this anomaly was one of the most wholesome effects of Stein's reforms; he gave the right to vote to everybody who had his domicile in the town and had a certain

minimum income. In the centuries in which the absolute princes had debarred the guilds from taking any part in the national government, they had developed a narrow-mindedness and selfish regard for their petty interests which were incompatible with the community spirit which Stein wished to resuscitate.

When Stein therefore set out to abolish the guilds for certain crafts, he followed not only the economic necessities of his age which made for efficiency and economic liberty, but he hoped that the obsolete guilds could be replaced by newly formed corporations of propertied middle class men which would take over the social function formerly fulfilled by the guilds. Stein's conception of society was determined by the belief that social relations find their best expression in "estates" (*Stände*), that is to say, in organisations of men who are ruled by a strong community spirit and a definite conception of professional honour. In this Stein was sadly deceived, for he did not take into account the fact which indeed he could not notice, that the industrial development would create a vast class of non-propertied proletarians and would replace the system of estates by the system of classes which no longer had any community spirit and were only held together by the fact that they had the same chances in the labour market.¹

When Stein in his famous reform of the constitution of the towns accorded the right to elect the municipal council not to the guilds but to the propertied body of citizens as a whole, he did not—as has been asserted—anticipate the modern democratic parliament, but he realised that representation through guilds would prevent the citizens from developing a municipality spirit which could be used as a counter-weight against the central bureaucracy. It must be noted that Stein always insisted on property as the chief claim to political rights. He had a firm belief in the moral value of property and was convinced that the proprietor who was given some share in the government would have the greatest interest in maintaining law and order. Stein shared Burke's suspicion of lawyers, and

¹ Cf. M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 631 ff.

throughout his life he professed a deep contempt for the bureaucracy, which is somewhat strange if we remember that all the reforms had been carried out and often even planned by able and progressive-minded officials.

In order to understand his attitude we must bear in mind that the part played by the state officials in the municipal administration had had devastating effects on the political life of the commonwealth. The Government used to appoint retired soldiers as burgomasters, who as often as not were incapable and left the management of affairs to corrupt and presuming lawyers. If there was a garrison in the town, as was often the case, the noble officers treated the citizens with contempt or at best with condescension, and the effect was that the citizens were wholly free from any sense of public responsibility.¹ This deplorable state of affairs is largely responsible for the unimportant part which the German middle classes played in politics until well into the nineteenth century.²

It is characteristic of Stein's true conviction with regard to the guild system that in the later stages of his career, when he was no longer engaged in practical politics, he deeply deplored the extinction of the guilds and felt inclined to look upon them through the eyes of the Romantics.

The introduction of self-government in the towns is Stein's most memorable contribution to the political development of Germany. In this he was no doubt deeply influenced by the English example and by Montesquieu. We know that he closely studied Invernois' book on the English system of self-government, which was the first continental study of this subject. One of his friends and collaborators, Vincke, had given special

¹ Even in the so-called free towns of the Empire, municipal government was corrupt and inefficient and here the guilds played a pernicious part as supporters of a small caste of patricians, whose rule was often worse than that of the territorial princes.

² The intellectual standard of the middle classes was exceedingly poor. At the time of the reforms, three hundred out of nine hundred artisans in Grüneberg, for instance, could not even write their names, and a further three hundred could only write with great difficulty. Lehmann, *Stein*, vol. i, p. 356.

attention to this problem and had laid down in an important book the results of his investigations which he had carried out in England itself. Stein succeeded in this particular task so well because after 1806 the absolute power was too weak to offer resistance and the nobility was not essentially interested in the fate of the towns. Many far-seeing people, moreover, greeted this reform as a safety-valve against revolution and as an attempt to avoid the results which the stubborn resistance of the ruling classes had produced in France. There was indeed no better way, as Engels later pointed out, to turn the *petit bourgeois* into a conservative and into a staunch supporter of throne and altar than by giving him a share in local government.¹ Ideas such as these were far from Stein's mind, for he was sincerely convinced that the establishment of self-government would educate the citizens to such an extent that they would take part in an intelligent way in the affairs of the whole realm and not remain solely concerned with the affairs of their municipalities. Stein's chief aim was to increase the sense of responsibility in the individual, and he believed that this end could be achieved best if the individuals controlled the finances of their municipalities. He maintained that municipal politics would prove a valuable training for national politics, and so undoubtedly it would have done if self-government had not remained confined to the towns. Self-government, as Stein devised it, was only the first tier in a system of representative government which was to be crowned by national representation. It was not his fault, but it was certainly to Germany's cost that this inspiring scheme could not be put into practice in face of the stubborn resistance of the established forces which had regained their strength after the nightmare of the Revolution seemed to have passed.

Municipal representation by districts and not by corporations was one of the measures which were put into practice in revolutionary France, and Stein had actually adopted one

¹ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Berlin, 1922, I Abteilung, Band 6, p. 236.

or two clauses from the revolutionary municipal laws. This fact has been adduced as a proof that Stein was deeply influenced by the French Revolution and that he and his collaborators only carried out the revolution from above which in France had been carried out by the people.¹ This assertion is only true in the sense in which Engels called Napoleon the creator of the German bourgeoisie.² Stein was influenced by the French Revolution in so far as its occurrence brought home to him the necessity for thorough reforms.

We possess abundant evidence that Stein loathed the Revolution and that he had very little use for its ideas. He called Rousseau a man with a sick heart and was deeply shocked by his sentimentality and evident republicanism. Stein never believed in the sovereignty of the people and the contract theory seemed to him, the historian, a worthless and dangerous falsification of the facts. His ideal was a constitutional monarchy after the pattern of England, where Crown, nobility, and wealthy men of the middle class together governed the country, and he had only contempt for the rule of the rabble as it seemed to have been established in France after 1790. When he demanded the co-operation of the middle classes, he did so not in order to weaken the monarchy but to strengthen it by securing the support of a vigorous and numerous class which usually, as he expressed it, furnishes the State with the most enlightened and active men.³ He wanted a strong and popular constitutional monarchy and not a despotic régime, against which he advanced arguments revealing his knowledge of Montesquieu, Hume and Herder. It was not his intention to re-establish the independence which the towns had enjoyed during the Middle Ages; he hoped on the contrary that the system of self-government would make them more inclined to share the fate of the whole commonwealth.

It is interesting to note that Stein's dislike of the Revolution

¹ French scholars described Stein's reforms as a weak imitation of the French Revolution. Cf. Cavaignac, *La formation de la Prusse contemporaine*.

² Loc. cit., p. 237.

³ Lehmann, loc. cit., vol. i, p. 44.

carried him so far that he entirely refused to acknowledge that the Revolution had historic causes. In his opinion it was only the outcome of the inborn wickedness of the French.¹ In this respect he was in complete agreement with Burke and he went even further than his friend Rehberg, who was at least unprejudiced enough to admit that the *ancien régime* was to a large extent responsible for the fate which had befallen it. The evidence for Stein's attitude towards the French Revolution during its early stages is scanty, but we know that as early as 1790 he expressed the deepest doubts concerning the outcome of the revolutionary events and characteristically confessed to a friend that calm reason and a steady character in an individual, as in a nation, seemed to him more important than enthusiasm for ideas.²

Stein's attitude towards the Revolution is typical of his whole political outlook. To him it seemed to be the embodiment of the "metaphysical" approach to politics and a foredoomed attempt to solve the political problems, not in accordance with historic experience and tradition but from the point of view of the theoretician who disregards reality for the sake of his utopian constructions. To denote his standpoint we might quote Professor Mannheim's distinction between the progressive and the conservative type, according to which the former experiences the present always as the beginning of the future, whereas the latter regards the present as the last stage of the past.³ In this sense Stein certainly was a conservative. He saw very clearly how much the thought of the Enlightenment determined the actions of the revolutionaries, how little they were led by experience and how often misled by theoretical phantoms; like Möser he noticed the close resemblance between the revolutionary despotism and the

¹ Cf. the following passage: "Louis XVI ne perdit sa trône point pour avoir conspiré comme Jacques II contre la liberté et la religion de son peuple mais pour lui avoir marqué une confiance, un abandon, une sollicitude qui l'a rendu le plus malheureux des rois et sa nation la plus criminelle de toutes celles mentionnées dans l'histoire." *Briefwechsel*, vol. iv, p. 573; and vol. v, p. 225.

² *Briefwechsel*, vol. i, p. 172.

³ *Das konservative Denken*, p. 99.

despotism of the *ancien régime*. Napoleon seemed to him the corroboration of his fear that a state which was not based on the voluntary co-operation of the corporations, and was disintegrated into a mass of equal citizens, would be superseded by tyranny. Although his concept of the State was fundamentally feudal, he deeply deplored that in modern times the estates in the feudal order, nobility, bourgeoisie and peasantry, had lost their social function and that the latter had become the objects of suppression and exploitation. His ideal was that of a corporative state, in which these estates contribute to the community according to their social position and collaborate harmoniously with the Crown. Stein believed that this ideal had been achieved in Germany during the early Middle Ages, and there is no doubt that in spite of his historical learning he followed the Romantics in sentimentalising mediaeval conditions. On the other hand, he shared Montesquieu's error when he believed that the Crown in England still held genuine political power which it shared with the nobility and the wealthy merchants.

Stein, however, could not prevent the ideas of 1789 from becoming the leading ideas of the German middle classes in their struggle against the Crown, as is shown by the fact that the abortive revolution of 1848 was an imitation of 1789 and not of 1688. It is difficult to guess how the course of German history would have been altered had Stein's liberal conservatism prevailed and had the German princes given voluntarily what the masses in France and England had won by force. Stein's reforms remained in any case the greatest attempt ever made by a German statesman to bring Germany into line with the system of western political organisation, an attempt which was only repeated in 1848 and 1918. There is no doubt that if the German middle classes had acquired political responsibility as early as 1815, they would have been able to establish and to secure constitutional government before it was too late. Stein failed not because he was unequal to his gigantic task, but because the German bourgeoisie was too

weak and proved itself unable to extend the power which Stein bestowed on it in his municipal reform. The particular constellation of social forces in Prussia, its division into an advanced west and a backward east, completely frustrated the combination of feudal and liberal ideas as favoured by Stein. The German people remained, as Hölderlin complained, rich in thought but poor in deed.

In the other great reform which was carried out under Stein's administration, the liberation of the serfs, Stein himself had a comparatively small share. It was chiefly the work of a team of his able collaborators who had realised that a complete re-organisation of the economic system was necessary in order to overcome the disastrous consequences of the lost war. These men were pupils of Kant and Smith, and they were genuine liberals in the sense that they believed in the ability of the individual to promote his own happiness and that of others if only the State refrained from interference. This theory fitted the economic necessities extraordinarily well because after the disaster of 1806 the Prussian state was hardly capable of helping its subjects in any way and was on the contrary very much dependent on their economic strength. According to the liberal thinkers, men such as Schroetter and Schön, prosperity would be secured if all the old institutions of the feudal order were removed and complete free trade was introduced. It is no accident that this movement started in East Prussia, which was then a corn-exporting country and depended on free markets for the sale of its own corn or that which was shipped from the East Prussian ports. It was also the country in which the greatest proportion of the land—about 65 per cent—was owned by the Crown, so that a reform could be carried through against the resistance of private owners. The East Prussian reformers realised that the value of the land would increase considerably and yield bigger rents if its free sale was permitted. For this purpose it was absolutely necessary that the serfs should be replaced by free labourers. They prepared, therefore, a decree by which serfdom

was abolished, the free sale of estates permitted, and members of the nobility were allowed to enter into any trade. This last provision had become particularly urgent, for many noble officers found themselves out of employment after the war, and were unable to buy an estate.

Stein desired the emancipation of the serfs for reasons which were widely different from those which actuated his liberal advisers. Schön and his circle demanded the freedom of the serfs because they held with their master, Kant, that nobody should be made a means for someone else, and because they believed with Adam Smith that free labour would be cheaper and more efficient than forced labour. Their unbounded optimism led them to the belief that man when he was freed from all fetters would create the best economic order possible. They knew moreover that agriculture in Prussia had been in a state of permanent crisis for years and would collapse if it was not speedily reformed. Stein took up their projects because he came from a district where he had seen a free peasantry and because he believed, like Möser, that the free peasant was the backbone of the Germanic state before feudalism had degenerated. Stein knew that serfs were not only bad workers but also bad citizens, and so he was in favour of a free and sound class of peasants who would sit together with the nobles in the local and provincial diets and thus acquire political responsibility. He realised at once the danger with which the peasants were threatened by the proposed reforms, for he knew that personal liberty was of greater advantage to the economically strong than to the weak. Until then the absolutist princes, who needed the peasants for their armies, had tried to protect them against the avidity of the nobility by prohibiting the *Bauernlegen*, that is, the destruction of smallholdings by joining them to the noble estate. In accordance with the proposed reforms all such barriers were to come down and the result would be that the landowners would buy out the smallholders and turn the serfs into free but penniless agricultural labourers. This was exactly what some of the liberal

reformers wanted. They naturally had no clear conception of how the future capitalist system was going to work, but they divined that economic progress was dependent on a large class of men who would be forced to sell their labour and would thus form the vast army in reserve on which capitalist entrepreneurs could draw if they wanted to increase their output. They considered Möser's and Stein's desire to preserve an independent yeomanry as sentimentality which was detrimental to the splendid cause of economic progress.

Stein, who was responsible for the extension of the decree of emancipation over the whole kingdom, tried to protect the peasants from these consequences. The preservation of the peasantry was for him not an economic but a moral issue, for in his eyes the peasants were the most valuable members of any community by reason of their deep attachment to the soil and their feeling for tradition. But again he failed, since the assent of the nobles had to be bought by bestowing on them the right to dispose of their estate with complete freedom and to extend their possessions *ad libitum*.¹ This bargain is extremely significant of the strong social position which the nobility still held in Prussia. The result of the reforms was, therefore, as Stein and others had predicted, disastrous for the peasantry. They did not produce a healthy class of yeomen; on the contrary they strengthened the position of the big landowners and contributed to the creation of a vast agricultural proletariat. What the liberal reformers had achieved was merely the introduction of the capitalist method of free competition and labour into agriculture. Most of the measures were put into practice by Stein's successor Hardenberg, who belonged to that group of enlightened officials who were strongly influenced by liberal ideas and had little use for Stein's predilection for tradition. Stein later considered Hardenberg's activity to be even pernicious, and he tried to minimise the part he had himself played in the agrarian reforms.

The abolition of serfdom made possible another reform which

¹ Cf. Winter, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Oktoberedikts*, p. 13.

was absolutely essential for the future of the kingdom: the reform of the military system. In spite of his hatred of the Revolution Stein could not help admiring its military achievements, above all its system of general conscription, which entirely revolutionised warfare. He realised that against "a people in arms" no army of mercenaries or pressed serfs would be able to offer successful resistance, and this conviction was shared by the men who were to reorganise the Prussian army, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. Neither of these men was a liberal, but both had learned their lesson from the French Revolution. They knew that national resistance was only possible with an army of soldiers who felt a strong attachment to the State and who considered their service as an honour. This is the reason why they were in favour of such reforms as were carried out by Stein, reforms which tended to transform rightless subjects into responsible citizens.¹ On the other hand, as soon as general conscription was introduced, the serfs were no longer the only stratum from which the army could be recruited and serfdom therefore became useless from a military point of view.

The humanitarian movement of the Enlightenment had done little to improve the appalling conditions in the military barracks. The thinkers of the Enlightenment considered war as a private affair of the princes, who employed the dregs of society as soldiers and had to maintain a cruel system of punishment in order to keep discipline. It was characteristic of this state of affairs that after the Battle of Jena the Governor of Berlin issued a decree in which he informed the citizens that the king had lost a battle and that they must keep calm. This was in accordance with the political thought of absolutism, according to which the townsmen who provided most of the revenue were supposed to go about their trade and not to mind about the king's political undertakings. All the outstanding thinkers of the eighteenth century had denounced the system

¹ Cf. Pertz, *Das Leben des Feldmarschalls Grafen Neithardt von Gneisenau*, vol. i, p. 320.

of standing armies; Blackstone had called the soldiers slaves, Hume compared a country with a big army to one which is in a state of civil war, and thinkers such as Montesquieu, Voltaire and Fichte poured scorn on the military profession. They all demanded, instead of a standing army a militia formed by the citizens who would thus hold despotism in check. Scharnhorst recognised that behind the enmity against the standing army lay the enmity against the State and he realised that a short-term militia would be inefficient from a military point of view, but he was wholly in agreement with the thinkers of the Enlightenment when they demanded the abolition of armies of mercenaries. In this spirit he carried out his revolutionary military reforms which again reflected the economic necessities, since the state was too poor to hire mercenaries any longer. Scharnhorst abolished the worst excesses of flogging, he improved the intellectual standing of the officers, who were in future to be subjected to examinations open to all citizens, and he prepared general conscription by which every able-bodied citizen was called upon to serve his fatherland.

As the economic reforms tended to bridge the gulf which had existed between town and country, so the military reforms tended to remove the rigid boundaries which had separated the officers from their subordinates. The military reform was therefore another important step towards the creation of a national consciousness. It is significant that the same circles protested against the military reforms which had resisted the economic reorganisation. The clique of noblemen feared that a national army would become revolutionary. That they failed in their efforts to thwart the reform was due to the fact that the economic and military necessities worked in the direction of the reformers. Scharnhorst's military reorganisation was the answer which militarist Prussia gave to the French Revolution.

There can be no doubt that with his reforms Scharnhorst laid the foundations for the amazing military development of Germany during the nineteenth century, and it is no accident that the man who was responsible for these reforms was not

a member of the nobility but was an ingenious son of the middle class, which in future was to provide Germany with many of her military leaders.

Stein's task, almost superhuman as it was, was made even more difficult by the lack of understanding which he encountered amongst his contemporaries. The king distrusted and feared him, the nobility looked on him as a Jacobin, and even his liberal collaborators misunderstood and ridiculed his intentions. One of the few men who shared his political convictions faithfully and grasped his gigantic though unrealisable concept of a modern feudal Empire on a liberal basis was Stein's secretary for propaganda, the poet Ernst Moritz Arndt, who has an undisputable claim to a place in a record of German political thought.

No one expressed in his political writings better than Arndt the hopes and final disappointment of the German middle classes, which had borne the brunt of the Napoleonic wars and had expected that the liberation from the enemy would be followed by an internal reform. Arndt was born the son of a farmer and the grandson of a liberated serf in a part of northern Germany which was under Swedish rule. One of his first political writings was devoted to the problem of serfdom, and it is not unlikely that this work contributed to the abolition of serfdom in the Swedish province. His belief in a sound peasant class as a fundamental part of the State was one of the reasons for his unremitting admiration for Stein, through whose October decree the Government had, in Arndt's opinion, indicated that "the people are something divine and unperishable."¹ This belief in the sanctity of the people is Arndt's basic political principle. Following the historic tendency of the age as initiated by Herder and Möser, he saw in the people not the partner in a social contract or an association of individuals, but the incarnation of the moral and intellectual forces of a nation. He was one of the first to conceive of the nation as a racial unity and he warned his fellow countrymen

¹ Cf. Müsebeck, *E. M. Arndt*, p. 275.

against mixing with racially different peoples such as the Jews. Again and again in his numerous writings he praised the national qualities of the Germans and contrasted them with the moral weakness of the French. His eloquent patriotism was no doubt influenced by the fact that he was born a Swedish subject, which made him particularly conscious of the lack of German unity. His patriotism, moreover, like that of most of his class, was heated to incandescence by the ordeal through which Germany was going. This feverish nationalism, of which the poet Kleist was the most excessive representative, illustrates a phenomenon which is peculiar to German history: the sequence of fervently patriotic periods after periods of complete national apathy.

Arndt's belief in the sanctity of the people determined his attitude towards the Revolution. He knew enough of French history to realise that the people were driven to revolution by misgovernment and suppression. Since he saw in the people the backbone of the State, he was consistent enough to accord it a right to overthrow its government if it could obtain no lawful redress for its grievances. Nevertheless Arndt's political convictions had little in common with those of the revolutionaries. His Germanic mysticism and individualism were offended by their attempts to rationalise politics, and his patriotism flamed up when it appeared that the outcome of the Revolution was the suppression of other nations. He disliked the claim of the French political thinkers to lay down rules which would be valid for all nations and his historical sense led him to the belief that each nation should find the political form suited to its particular conditions. In this Arndt expressed the growing distrust of the "metaphysical approach" to political questions and he showed a strong sense of political reality, which the thinkers of the end of the eighteenth century seemed to have lost; he was one of the men who taught his compatriots to think of the German nation and the German state instead of thinking of a philosophic abstraction.

When Stein organised the national resistance against

Napoleon, Arndt became his secretary and he wrote pamphlet after pamphlet in which he called the Germans to arms. But he was not only a patriotic preacher of revenge, he was also a serious political thinker who realised that the challenge of the Revolution must be met by thorough internal reforms. Like his master Stein, he believed that the people ought to have a share in government if his aim, a nation with a high standard of morality, was to be achieved. He accorded democratic rights to the people, not because he believed that this was in accordance with Natural Law or demanded by political philosophy, but because he was convinced that self-government was an old Germanic institution and that the people must be given a chance to strive after moral perfection.¹ Yet Arndt was a monarchist, like most of his contemporaries, for republicanism did not begin to develop until it had become clear that the German princes did not intend to give the people any share in the government. His ideal was that of a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral parliament elected by all the citizens. Thus it seems as if Arndt was, after all, a pupil of the Revolution and one of the first democrats in Germany. In fact his concept of the State, like that of Stein, was feudal. In his State nobility, burghers and peasantry were not to lose their particular social status, as in a rational democracy after the French model, but were to maintain it and contribute to the State according to their ability. A parliament elected by the different social orders and not by the citizens as such should exert legislative power, but the king should have the ultimate decision in the most important issues. Arndt strongly urged the reform of the nobility after the English model, but he did not want to abolish it.

Again we encounter this curiously utopian attempt to reform the political system in a way which was at the same time feudal and modern, conservative and liberal, an attempt which reflects the complicated configuration of the political tendencies of the time and the peculiar utopianism of German

¹ Cf. *Ueber künftige ständische Verfassungen in Deutschland*, p. 14.

political thought. Arndt has been severely taken to task by Treitschke for his utopianism, but Treitschke forgets that he cannot rebuke Arndt and exonerate Stein at the same time. Arndt's thought was the answer which the disciple of the German Idealists gave to the impetus of the French Revolution and his attempt, as we must remember, did not seem utopian to him, for he believed in the moral perfectibility of man. He was sincerely convinced that if all classes were given responsibility they would act according to the categorical imperative and work peacefully for the common good. Arndt's feudal state must therefore not be confounded with the dreams of the Romantics or the claims of their reactionary allies. If the latter talked of the mediaeval feudal state, they meant the absolute predominance of the nobility, and the liberation of the peasants was anathema to them. Arndt's theory was truly democratic in the sense that he sincerely desired equality under the law, but in spite of his sense of reality he overlooked the fact that the maintenance of the feudal classes would prevent equality under the law from becoming effective.

Arndt shared the common distrust of absolutism, he attacked the governmental system of Frederick the Great as Herder and Fichte had done and he hoped that his parliament, based on the historic social orders, would be a counter-weight against arbitrariness. His liberalism reveals itself in his urgent demand for freedom of the Press and for the guarantee of life and property against unlawful encroachments. His attitude towards Burke is of particular interest. He regarded him as one of the cleverest and most ingenious defenders of the old order of society, but he expressed doubt as to the validity of his opinion that a social organisation which had been good for centuries must still be good.¹

It is possible that this attempt to fill the French ideas with a specific Germanic spirit would have succeeded had Crown and nobility supported it. Since they did not do so, the liberal and democratic movement in Germany, as it gathered strength

¹ Cf. *Ueber künftige ständische Verfassungen in Deutschland*, p. 34.

after the war of liberation, remained faithful to the radical and anti-feudal ideas of 1789. In this respect it is significant that Arndt met with a comparatively cool reception when as an old man he appeared in the first democratic parliament in 1848, and confessed that he considered himself as the "good old German conscience."

Arndt, like his master Stein, was one of the most ardent apostles of German unity. When he first concerned himself with this problem he hoped, like Stein, that the old German Empire under an Austrian emperor could be re-established and that it could be the guarantor of economic unity and political liberty. His dislike of Prussia prevented him from seeing that this solution was impossible, since Prussia would never give up her predominant position. When the Congress of Vienna was opened, Arndt felt more positively towards Prussia and he began to dream of a Germany under Prussian leadership. Like Stein he fought against German particularism and vigorously demanded the dethronement of the small German princes. He was to be one of the men who, in 1849, implored the Prussian king to accept the Imperial crown. The solution of the German question at which the statesmen arrived at the Congress of Vienna filled him with deep disappointment and roused him to bitter attacks against the responsible Powers.

Stein has often been severely criticised for his attitude towards the question of national unity, and indeed his work in this direction reveals much confusion of thought and indecision.¹ We are not concerned here with the history of the attempts to establish German unity which has been so ably written by Srbik, and we can therefore refrain from recording Stein's numerous plans and memoranda with regard to this problem. Stein retained until the end his ideal of a rejuvenated Holy Roman Empire, which would be ruled by an emperor, a council of the greater princes, and a parliament. He also felt the deepest disappointment about the Confederacy which had been created at the Congress instead of a united

¹ Cf. Schmidt, *Geschichte der deutschen Verfassungsfrage*, passim.

or at least a confederate state. The rest of his life was overshadowed by the feeling that he had failed in his greatest task; yet apart from Bismarck nobody did more than he to achieve the goal of German unity by strengthening those forces which after the failure of the German middle classes could alone carry this work through: the Prussian Crown and the Prussian army.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE OPPOSITION

THE most important outcome of the French Revolution in France had been the definite defeat of the nobility, a defeat from which it was never able to recover. The result of the reforms in Prussia was the revival of the political position of the Prussian nobles, who continued to exert a social predominance which was wholly out of proportion to their numerical and economic strength, though perhaps not to the services which they rendered to the monarchy.

Under the influence of the Enlightenment, public opinion had been unmistakably hostile to the nobility in the whole of the German Empire.¹ Not a single one of the leading political thinkers had been willing to defend the privileged status hitherto enjoyed by nobility and all demanded thoroughgoing reforms which were to achieve the same results which had been produced by a violent revolution in France. Even if we look through the books for children, we find stories in which the wickedness of the nobleman is exposed and the virtue of the peasant or the artisan extolled. When in 1806-1807 disaster overtook the monarchy, which had found its chief support in an army led by noble officers, there was much malicious rejoicing amongst the other classes about the plight of the nobility, who were made responsible for the catastrophe. Scores of books and pamphlets appeared in which this point was stressed with much abuse and in which the hope was expressed that Napoleon would clear away the rubbish-heap of the old order of society.²

¹ Cf. J. Schultze, *Die Auseinandersetzung zwischen Adel und Bürgertum in den deutschen Zeitschriften der letzten drei Jahrzehnte des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*.

² Cf. F. Buchholz, *Untersuchungen über den Geburtsadel und die Möglichkeit seiner Fortdauer im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, Berlin 1807; also Tschirch, *Geschichte der öffentlichen Meinung in Preussen*, vol. ii, pp. 4, 76 ff.

In reality, however, the Prussian nobility were not defeated. They received, it is true, a heavy blow on the battlefield of Jena, but in order to turn this blow into a decisive defeat it would have been necessary for the Prussian middle classes to take the same course as had been taken in France, which was precisely what they were incapable of doing. Nor must it be forgotten that the Crown and the reforming bureaucracy were far from wishing to see nobility destroyed or even substantially weakened. Stein was far too much of a nobleman himself to desire the complete abolition of the nobility, and the king, knowing what his predecessors had owed to the Prussian noble class, was most reluctant to interfere with their privileged position, though he very jealously guarded the absolute predominance of the Crown.

The years from 1806 until 1815 were the years in which the foundations were laid upon which the German bourgeoisie could build up the imposing structure of German industry and commerce, but it was in these years also that the military and political basis of the new Empire was laid. German unity was to be achieved not by the liberal forces which had first taken up the cry of a united Reich, but by the conservatives, who understood how to use the nationalist tendencies for the strengthening of the Prussian monarchy. The history of conservative thought in the nineteenth century is a complex one, for the most diverse intellectual, social, and economic tendencies had blended and produced a fabric of ideas which could be successfully used in the struggle with the rising liberal and radical tendencies. Modern German conservatism developed essentially as an answer to the French Revolution. No doubt there had always been men who were averse to any change in the social order on principle and preferred to maintain the old institutions as long as possible. These men might be called conservatives, but their traditionalist tendencies never formed themselves into a coherent body of thought or a political movement as long as the old order remained intact. Men like Möser defined their traditionalist attitude in the struggle against

the encroachment of absolutism upon the time-honoured privileges of the "estates"; modern conservatives developed a system of political philosophy for the defence of an order which had been shaken to its foundations by the attack of a whole class. Möser thought in terms of the patriarchal and idyllic small state; the conservatives of the nineteenth century had to take into account an economic development which had rendered impossible the redissolution of the centralised state into a conglomerate of feudal relationships. Their aim was to defend the sovereignty of the monarch against the claim of the growing middle and lower classes for a share in the government, whereas in former times they had had to defend themselves against the Crown. This struggle between liberal and conservative tendencies which characterises the political thought of the nineteenth century was the reflection of an economic development which on the one hand necessitated a strong State and on the other brought increasing wealth to the middle classes and increasing insecurity to the proletariat.¹ This situation forced the nobles to rally to the support of the Crown and to retort to the political philosophy of the liberal and democratic camps by a political philosophy of their own by which the claims of the radicals could be successfully refuted.

This conservative political philosophy drew freely from all those tendencies and currents which sprang up in reaction to the French Revolution, the ramifications of which we have followed in the foregoing chapters. Conservatism, which had been a psychological frame of mind in certain individuals, became the rationalised expression of a class attitude. Neither Burke nor Möser had been systematic political thinkers, rather they were *laudatores temporis acti* who felt inclined to judge events in a way which we have called historical. Their emphasis on the past and their insistence on the unbroken

¹ This is not contradicted by the fact that the general standard of life improved continuously; this improvement merely served to raise the demands of those who received the lowest share in the social output.

continuity between the different stages of the history of a nation were among the most important factors which went to the making of a conservative philosophy. If Burke has been called one of the fathers of modern conservatism, this is beyond doubt true in the sense that he expressed better than anyone else the desire for stability in society, a desire which lies at the root of all conservative thinking. The German conservative thinkers learned from Burke to think in historical categories, but they also learned from him to think of the State not as a congeries of patriarchal relationships but as an organic unity. It was under his influence that they came to use the organic metaphor for the elaboration of a theory according to which the modern monarchy became the prototype of government and the form which best guaranteed the social status of the nobility. By a modern monarchy, however, the conservatives understood a government in which the king, although not subject to the consent of his people, yet was restricted by the position which the nobility enjoyed in the army, the administration and as owners of the land.¹

In their endeavour to stem the tide of the Revolution, the leaders of the nobility, whose social position predisposed them to be the leaders of an anti-revolutionary movement, allied themselves with all tendencies which seemed to guarantee the *status quo*. No social group was better fitted to oppose the Revolution than the nobility with its wealth of political experience and the prestige which it had enjoyed for centuries. It was for these reasons that politicians such as Marwitz used the good services of Adam Müller, in spite of the deep discrepancies in their thought and although Marwitz soon realised that Müller had a very personal axe to grind. The romantic glorification of the monarchy, its insistence on the mission of the nobility, its organic ideology, even its religious mysticism, were important factors in the genesis of a conservative philo-

¹ How strong the position of the nobility was is illustrated by the fact that until 1918 almost all diplomatic representatives and about two-thirds of the Prussian *Landräte* were nobles.

sophy. Nor did later conservative thinkers disdain to gather fruit even from the fields of liberalism. Kant's categorical imperative, Fichte's moral nationalism, and Humboldt's educational schemes were adopted and usefully employed for the elaboration of a concept of uncritical obedience to the monarch as the legitimate representative of the nation. Conservatism was rather late in adopting the idea of German national unity, and it is well known that it was conservative circles which opposed Bismarck even more strongly than did his liberal adversaries.

The most important element in the development of a conservative philosophy was the use made of feudal ideas. Feudalism had been a form of social organisation and not a political theory or the catchword of a political movement. It is highly significant that a political theory of feudalism developed exactly at a time when its foundations had been successfully undermined. The nobles, who were the backbone of the feudal society and who were in danger of losing their social predominance if this society broke down, were unable to elaborate this required philosophy themselves. They were men of action, landowners and officers who despised books and who had never even so much as suspected that their predominant place in society could be called in question. They belonged to families which had been in the country for centuries and which were inclined to look upon the Hohenzollern as intruders. Like most European monarchies Prussia had emerged out of a fierce struggle with the *fronde* of nobles who, in this case, had been subdued under Joachim but who had never been wholly subjected. The monarchist state had, as it were, surrounded feudal society but never assimilated it.¹ After the French Revolution the nobles had to fight on two fronts. On the one side they had to resist the rising liberal and democratic forces of the middle classes and on the other to defend their status against the encroachments of the Crown. This struggle with the Crown came to a head after the disaster

¹ Cf. Nadler, *Berliner Romantik*, p. 149.

of 1806; for although the Crown was unwilling to suppress the nobility, it was forced by the exactions of Napoleon to demand of the nobles an equal share in the burden of taxation. This implied inevitably a reform in the whole status of the nobility and seriously endangered their social predominance.

It is very tempting to explain the struggle between the Crown and the noble "estates" wholly in terms of economic aims. There is no doubt that the Prussian state could no longer endure an intransigent class of landowners who virtually defaulted in their economic contribution towards the maintenance of the commonwealth.¹ The exemption from taxation had been justifiable in a period when the nobles placed their military strength at the disposal of their overlord; it had become obsolete and in the highest degree unjust at a time when the State maintained a strong army and the king had ceased to be a feudal overlord and become the representative of the nation. On the other hand it is understandable that the nobles who had suffered severely during the war tried everything to maintain their privileged position and the advantages which they derived from the cheap labour of the serfs. Yet the struggle between Hardenberg, the exponent of governmental liberalism, and the nobles was more than a struggle for economic key-positions. It is true that it reflected the struggle of two classes for the redefinition of the legal form of property, but it was also the struggle between two different theories of the State, a struggle which cannot wholly be explained in economic terms. Hardenberg, who carried out the work which was begun by Stein, was strongly influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment and the liberal dogmas of his subordinates, but he was too passionately fond of power to let his actions be directed by his belief in political or economic principles. He had attentively observed the development in France and diligently read the works of Adam Smith, but

¹ One instance may suffice: In 1806 in the province "Kurmark" the towns paid two and a half million thalers, the peasants 644,000 thalers in taxes, whereas the noble landowners paid only 21,000 thalers. Treitschke, *Deutsche Geschichte*, vol. i, p. 157.

he was wholly free from all illusions as to the possibility of a decisive reform in Prussia. Nevertheless he was the protagonist of the middle classes in Prussia and the spokesman of a new theory of the State. His task was to adapt the complicated structure of the Prussian *ancien régime* to the exigencies of a new era, and he successfully steered a middle course between the radical demands of his advisers and the stubborn resistance of the nobility. His genius lay in his ability to compromise, an ability in which Stein had been entirely lacking, and it was on account of the pragmatic character of his liberalism that he was able to carry out the most urgent reforms without upsetting the balance of the social order. He, who came from an old noble family himself, was certainly not conscious of his rôle as a leader of the middle class and he was therefore inclined to give in to the demands of the nobility whenever he could. Although the nobles abused him as the worst enemy of their class-interests they owed him a great deal for his attempts to spare their privileges as far as was possible.

The nobles regarded Hardenberg as the embodiment of all the evil principles by which Europe had been disturbed ever since the outbreak of the French Revolution. When they opposed his reforms, above all his financial decree of 1811 which virtually abolished tax exemptions and introduced freedom of trade, they were not only defending their economic interests but their theory of the State, which seemed to them the only guarantee of order and progress. Their arguments furnish us with an interesting documentation for the well-known fact that classes advance political theories always in terms of common welfare and absolute validity. It is significant that in their protests, memoranda, and pamphlets they rarely attacked the measures of the Government as such, but complained that they had been put into practice without their consent. They defended their rights in the name of the Constitution which in their opinion had guaranteed their status irrevocably. It cannot be denied that from a legal point of view they were perfectly justified in talking of a flagrant breach

of the Constitution. The nobles only forgot that this Constitution itself had been the expression of a social order the basis of which had disappeared, and that a new social order which necessitated a new legal expression was in the process of being born. They absolutely refused to admit that the state of Frederick II had collapsed because of its innate deficiencies, and not unreasonably they attributed the catastrophe to the shortcomings of single individuals at the head of government and army.

The most eminent representative of this section of Prussian society, the importance of which for the development of German politics cannot be overrated, was the Junker Marwitz. In his lengthy writings, of which only parts have been published, he developed the political ideas of his class with such clarity and vivacity that it is possible for us to imagine what this social group thought as a whole.¹ He was certainly one of the best representatives of his type, a man who in spite of his contempt for bookishness and learning had acquired a sound knowledge of affairs beyond the military sphere, whereas most of his associates made a point of being uneducated. Marwitz himself stated the reason for his contempt and even hatred of intellectuals. "A scholar," he wrote, "who is not a liberal is as rare as a white raven."² This utterance is highly interesting as it indicates that the intelligentsia was on the side of the reformers. Marwitz, however, in spite of his contempt for liberal theorists, took the trouble to defend the social position of his class in terms of legal and moral postulates. The French Revolution was, in his eyes, "a sinister rebellion of human superciliousness against divine order and law" and he did not doubt for a moment that the privileges of his class were merely the outcome of the divine order of society and more than justified by the important function which the nobility had to fulfil. He maintained, moreover, that these privileges had not been granted to the nobles but had been held by them since time

¹ *Friedrich August Ludwig von der Marwitz*, ed. F. Meusel.

² *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

immemorial. He had a rigid belief in providence and it never occurred to him to wonder why God always seemed to be in favour of the interests of his class.

This in itself is not remarkable since vested interests have always been defended in moral and historical terms. It is important, however, that he himself did not behave by any means in the way which was ascribed to members of his class by its political opponents. He was not the supercilious Junker who exploited and maltreated his serfs and tried to avoid his obligations towards his sovereign. He represented on the contrary much that was good and admirable in feudal society, a genuine patriarchal interest in his estates and his serfs and a deep loyalty to the royal house. As he treated his serfs well he did not realise that there was an unbridgeable gulf between their interests and those of the noble landowners; he simply solved the social problem by maintaining that the serfs had the same interests as their lords since both depended on the land.¹ Nevertheless it is surprising that he should have failed to see that the accusations of oppression and exploitation raised by the liberals were true, if not in his own case, yet in the case of many members of his class.

Marwitz' opposition to Stein's and Hardenberg's reforms was determined by his fear that they would lead straight to revolution because they undermined the historic foundations upon which the old Prussian state had been built.² He was genuinely concerned for Prussia's greatness, to which he was willing to sacrifice a great deal, and he believed that her strength lay in the close alliance between Crown and nobility. Again and again he pointed out that this alliance had been confirmed

¹ "Der Bauernstand ist nichts weiter als die erweiterte Familie des Adels." Loc. cit., p. 103.

² Cf. the following passage in which the resemblance to Müller is striking: "Stein fing nun die Revolutionisierung des Vaterlandes an, den Krieg der Besitzlosen gegen das Eigentum, des Beweglichen gegen das Stabile, des krassen Materialismus gegen die von Gott eingeführte Ordnung, des (eingebildeten) Nutzens gegen das Recht, des Augenblickes gegen die Vergangenheit und Zukunft, des Individuums gegen die Familie," etc., loc. cit., vol. i, p. 492.

in numerous treaties between the king and his first estate and that the State would fall to pieces if this historic nexus should be broken. There were few political thinkers who had made an impression on this man, who was primarily a soldier and agriculturalist, but amongst those few were Montesquieu and Burke. Like Montesquieu he believed that the nobility was the class which mediated between Crown and the people, preventing the king from becoming a despot and setting the people an example in loyalty and military virtue. The French example taught him that a revolution became inevitable as soon as the strength of the nobility was undermined, just as in his opinion the Roman state collapsed after the plebeians had been admitted to power. Marwitz was convinced that Prussia could only thrive if it maintained an exceedingly high military standard, and it was for this purpose that he considered the predominance of the nobility absolutely necessary. It is not surprising that he had not a high opinion of the middle class of his time, he despised their cowardice and saw through the utopianism and airiness of their intellectual leaders.

He admired Burke because of his insistence on the historic forces in society and because of his readiness to admit that prejudices were important factors in the working of the social organism. Marwitz himself never concealed his prejudices, and he was, like all strong personalities, a good hater. If we examine the objects of his hatred we find that at the back of it there always lies his concern for a strong and glorious Prussia as a military and agrarian state. Marwitz led the last attack against the bureaucratic absolutism, he was the last representative of the *Fronde*, but at the same time he led the first attack against industrial capitalism. He abused the freemasons on account of their cosmopolitanism, he hated Napoleon who had humiliated Germany, he hated the Roman Law because it had been an instrument in the hands of the absolutist princes for the destruction of the feudal order, and he hated the Jews because they seemed to him the exponents of a

rootless financial capitalism. Conservatism in Germany in the nineteenth century was to be anti-semitic, though it was a Jew who wrote the conservative programme, but its right agriculturalist wing, which traced its origin back to Marwitz and his circle, was almost as violently anti-Jewish as the National Socialists of to-day. One of the reasons for this is the fact that the emancipation of the Jews was simultaneous and came to be associated with the breakdown of Prussia.¹ There had been a strong movement in favour of their emancipation under the influence of the Enlightenment during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, but this movement remained confined to some intellectual circles and nothing came of it.² Napoleon, on the other hand, liberated the Jews wherever he went, and so it is not surprising that Jewish intellectuals were among his most ardent admirers, whereby they incurred the hatred of the German patriots.³ In Prussia the Jews were emancipated shortly after the war of liberation in connection with Hardenberg's reforms. In the economic sphere the Jews, who had been financiers for centuries, were the first to avail themselves of the facilities offered by the reforms. They began to speculate in landed property and many nobles who had been ruined in the war became financially dependent on them. Thus the time of the war of liberation is characterised by an outbreak of violent anti-semitism. Fichte, Müller, Görres and Stein had always disliked the Jews, but the circle around the Junker poets Arnim and Kleist adopted anti-semitism as one of their political principles. The anti-semitism of this period, however, was not based on racial grounds but on the assumption that the Jews form a state within the state and are therefore detrimental to national

¹ Similarly after 1918 the participation of the Jews in the Weimar republic was associated with the collapse of Germany in the Great War.

² It found its first literary expression in Dohm's book *Ueber die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden*, 1781.

³ Cf. Napoleon's letter to Jerome: "Mon intention d'ailleurs en vous établissant dans votre royaume est de vous donner une constitution régulière qui efface dans toutes les classes de vos peuples ces vaines et ridicules distinctions." Hardenberg, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, vol. iv, p. 119.

unity.¹ It is noteworthy that the Junkers, in one of their addresses to Hardenberg drawn up by Marwitz, complained that the reforms had turned the Brandenburg-Prussian state into a new-fangled "Judenstaat" by allowing the Jews to acquire landed property.² More than a century later their descendants designate the Weimar republic as a "Judenrepublik." Thus the first attack against capitalism was chiefly directed against liberals and Jews. On this occasion it was launched in the name of feudalism, a century later it is launched in the name of middle class socialism.³

Yet in spite of all his prejudices Marwitz was not a reactionary. He strongly disapproved of the notorious Carlsbad Decrees, and he despised the efforts of the Government to suspect Jacobinism everywhere. He disagreed with the liberals who wanted equality, but he disagreed just as strongly with the Government which wanted to destroy liberty. Marwitz' attitude was not a reactionary one for the simple reason that he did not want the preservation of the political order in which he lived, but he wanted it reformed. He merely wished that this reform should take into account what he considered the traditional forces of the Prussian monarchy. The Junkers became reactionaries only after they had buried the hatchet with the Government and had to fight for their existence against the rising democratic forces. It was then that they became the representatives of a stupid and narrow-minded opposition to any reform and a by-word for social superciliousness and backwardness. Marwitz was the first to give expression to their militaristic and Prussian outlook and thus he has rightly been considered as one of the spiritual fathers of the conservative party of imperial Germany. The later conservatives, however, grafted this militarist and Prussian outlook on to the theory of a strong and centralised state, a theory which

¹ Cf. F. Rühs, *Ueber die Ansprüche der Juden an das deutsche Bürgerrecht*, Berlin, 1816.

² Marwitz, vol. i, p. xxxvii.

³ "The hatred against the Jews," Oelsner wrote to Varnhagen, "brings us increasingly nearer to the Middle Ages of which our sentimental age is so tenderly fond." Stern, *Deutsche Geschichte*, p. 319.

was far from Marwitz' mind. In his opinion nothing was further from the truth than the idea that the king was the servant of the State, he regarded him solely as the overlord of his feudal followers. He violently attacked the political theory of the Enlightenment which demanded of the ruler that he should promote the happiness of his subjects, whereas in Marwitz' opinion the prince had merely to maintain order and justice. His power was given him not by the people but by God.¹ This is why Marwitz was opposed to the institution of a civil list by which the king would be turned into a paid official instead of being the patriarchal owner of his domains.

The French Revolution had finally and irrevocably established the sovereignty of the State; through Marwitz the nobility undertook the last attempt to re-establish the feudal state.² This attempt was doomed to failure since absolutism was a historic fact on which there was no going back, and this failure is dramatically illustrated by Marwitz' imprisonment on Hardenberg's order for having obstructed the work of the Government. Hardenberg remained victorious in this struggle though he had few followers, because he had the power of the State behind him and the exigencies of the economic situation worked in his favour.

How hopeless this struggle was for Hardenberg's feudal and Romantic opponents is illustrated by the fate which overtook the *Berliner Abendblätter*, the journalistic organ of the opposition. Its editor, Heinrich von Kleist, supported by Adam Müller, took up the fight against the spirit of liberalism and at the same time carried out violent propaganda against Napoleon as far as he could in a town which was virtually ruled by French officials. The general spirit of the paper can best be characterised by a remark in it according to which "things would be better in Europe if Voltaire had been forgotten in the Bastille and Rousseau had been put into a lunatic

¹ Marwitz, vol. i, p. 39.

² The Swiss Haller was the political philosopher of this movement. His main work, which bears the significant title *The Restoration of Political Science*, appeared in 1818.

asylum."¹ Müller wrote learned articles in which he criticised the teachings of the professor Kraus, who was the most famous disciple of Adam Smith in Germany, through which he meant to strike at the Government. The nobles found in this paper journalistic support for their political claims, but Hardenberg was not willing to let himself be attacked publicly. He effectively silenced Adam Müller by buying him over and he ruined the paper when he saw that Kleist could not be bought likewise. At first he forced Kleist to publish inspired articles in which he denounced "those obscure apostles of servitude and feudalism from the school of Burke."² This damaged the reputation of the paper severely and by way of compensation Hardenberg promised to furnish the editor with interesting official material. When this material was not forthcoming the paper had to cease publication and Kleist was financially ruined. There is no doubt that this failure was one of the causes for Kleist's suicide.

Kleist was a poet of the first rank, who glorified Prussianism in his works and who devoted his genius, which always hovered on the borderline of madness, to the spiritual preparation of his countrymen against Napoleon. His drama, *Herrmannsschlacht*, is, apart from its value as a work of art, a thinly veiled and almost pathological diatribe against Napoleon and the French and at the same time a bitter comment on the cowardice and disunity of the Germans. His novel, *Michael Kohlhaas*, is one of the most powerful denunciations of absolutism, his *Käthchen von Heilbronn* a glowing glorification of the Middle Ages, and his *Prinz von Homburg* extolled the Prussian virtue of loyalty to the king in its violent conflict with duty towards the nation. The prince disobeyed his king but saved the state, just as a few years later the general York, by disobeying the orders of Frederick William III, was to give the signal to the war of liberation.

Kleist and his friend Arnim furnished the link between the Romantics and the feudal opponents of Hardenberg's adminis-

¹ Steig, *H. von Kleists Berliner Kämpfe*, p. 96.

² *Ibid.*, p. 76.

tration. Arnim was the founder of a club, "Die christliche germanische Tischgesellschaft," from which "Jews, Frenchmen, and philistines" were excluded and in which throne and altar were exalted as the highest ideals of the Prussian patriots.¹ This circle, to which officers, noblemen, writers, and professors belonged, can be regarded as the nucleus of the conservative party of the future, although it dissolved itself very soon.

Kleist was the only member of the opposition who thought in terms of German nationalism, while the patriotism of Marwitz and his friends was essentially Prussian. Their aim was to make Prussia the strongest state in Germany and they began to dream of a Germany under Prussian leadership. It was one of their class who was to solve the problem of German unity, not as the realisation of romantic ideals or of a strong popular movement, but as the triumph of Prussian militarism and of a consistent "policy of might."

The year 1815 forms a landmark in the history of the political thought of Germany. The monarchical State had broadened its basis by giving economic scope to its middle classes and a semblance of political responsibility in the institution of municipal self-government. The problem of German unity had been provisionally solved at the Congress of Vienna where the settling of accounts between Prussia and Austria was postponed for another fifty years. The war of liberation had displayed the moral and military strength of the German nation and the first signs of the democratic movement had appeared which was to determine the future course of German politics. But the Congress of Vienna opened at the same time the era of Restoration which Ranke called "a reaction of the nordic-germanic world against the revolutionary latin nations."²

The stage was set for the greatest German political philosopher, Hegel, to embody the emergence of a reconstructed Prussia in a philosophic system which aspired to give the ultimate answer to the old problems of justice and power,

¹ Cf. H. Becker, *A. von Arnim*.

² *Works*, vol. xl, p. 4.

but which in reality, following the dialectical principle which it professed, carried the seeds of its own destruction within itself and pointed the way to the immense social movement in the midst of which we are still living.

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APPENDIX

IN the following pages the passages which I have quoted in Chapter II in English are given in their original version.

P. 76. "Der Mensch ist ein Tier, das, wenn es unter anderen seiner Gattung lebt, einen Herrn nötig hat." *Works*, vol. i, p. 230.

P. 76. "Die Menschen arbeiten sich von selbst nach und nach aus der Rohigkeit heraus, wenn man nur nicht absichtlich künstelt, um sie darin zu erhalten." *Works*, vol. i, p. 170.

P. 77. "Man kann die Geschichte der Menschengattung im Grossen als die Vollziehung eines verborgenen Planes der Natur ansehen, um eine innerlich—and zu diesem Zwecke, auch äusserlich—vollkommene Staatsverfassung zustande zu bringen, als den einzigen Zustand, in welchen sie alle ihre Anlagen in der Menschheit völlig entwickeln kann." *Works*, vol. i, p. 235.

P. 78. "Ohne jene an sich zwar nicht liebenswürdigen Eigen-schaften der Ungeselligkeit . . . würden in einem arkadischen Schäfer-leben, bei vollkommener Eintracht, Genügsamkeit und Wechselleibe, alle Talente auf ewig in ihren Keimen verborgen bleiben." *Works*, vol. i, p. 228.

P. 80. "Es soll sich kein Staat im Kriege mit einem anderm solche Feindseligkeiten erlauben, welche das wechselseitige Zutrauen im künftigen Frieden unmöglich machen müssen; als da sind Anstel-lung von Meuchelmördern, Giftmischer, Brechung der Kapitulation, Anstiftung des Verrates in dem bekriegten Staat usw." *Works*, vol. v, p. 663.

P. 82. "Diese Gesetze sind entweder Gesetze der Natur, oder der Freiheit. Die Wissenschaft von den ersten heisst Physik, die der andern ist Ethik." *Works*, vol. v, p. 9.

P. 82. "Autonomie des Willens ist die Beschaffenheit des Willens, dadurch derselbe ihm selbst (unabhängig von aller Beschaffenheit der Gegenstände des Wollens) ein Gesetz ist." *Works*, vol. v, p. 73.

P. 84. "Diejenige, welche eine Handlung zur Pflicht und diese Pflicht zugleich zur Triebfeder macht, ist ethisch. Diejenige aber welche das letztere nicht im Gesetz mit einschliesst, mithin auch eine andere Triebfeder als die Idee der Pflicht selbst zulässt, ist juridisch." *Works*, vol. v, p. 322.

P. 85. "Eine bloss empirische Rechtslehre ist (wie der hölzerne Kopf im Phädrus Fabel) ein Kopf, der schön sein mag, nur Schade! dass er kein Gehirn hat." *Works*, vol. v, p. 335.

P. 85 n. "Der Souverain will das Volk nach seinen Begriffen glücklich machen, und wird Despot; das Volk will sich den allgemeinen menschlichen Anspruch auf eigene Glückseligkeit nicht nehmen lassen, und wird Rebell." *Works*, vol. i, p. 207.

P. 85. "Das Recht ist also der Inbegriff der Bedingungen, unter denen die Willkür des einen mit der Willkür des andern nach einem allgemeinen Gesetz der Freiheit zusammen vereinigt werden kann." *Works*, vol. v, p. 335.

P. 88. "Niemand kann mich zwingen, auf eine Art (wie er sich das Wohlsein anderer Menschen denkt) glücklich zu sein, sondern ein Jeder darf seine Glückseligkeit auf dem Wege suchen, welcher ihm selbst gut dünkt, wenn er nur der Freiheit anderer, einem ähnlichen Zwecke nachzustreben, die mit der Freiheit von jederman nach einem allgemeinen Gesetz zusammen bestehen kann (d.i. diesem Recht des andern) nicht Abbruch tut." *Works*, vol. i, p. 193.

P. 90. "Man kann nicht sagen; der Mensch im Staat habe einen Teil seiner angeborenen äusseren Freiheit einem Zweck aufgeopfert, sondern er hat die wilde, gesetzlose Freiheit gänzlich verlassen, um seine Freiheit überhaupt in einer gesetzlichen Abhängigkeit, d.i. in einem rechtlichen Zustande, unvermindert wieder zu finden." *Works*, vol. v, p. 436.

P. 91 n. "Die Staatsverfassung stützt sich am Ende auf die Moralität des Volkes und diese wiederum kann ohne gute Staatsverfassung nicht gehörig Wurzel fassen." Reicke, F 15

P. 92. "Also kann nur der übereinstimmende und vereinigte Wille Aller mithin nur der allgemein vereinigte Volkswille gesetzgebend sein." *Works*, vol. v, p. 434.

P. 93. "Der Herrscher im Staat hat gegen den Untertan lauter Rechte und keine (Zwang) Pflichten." *Works*, vol. v, p. 440.

P. 93. "Wenn eine Revolution einmal gelungen und eine neue Verfassung gegründet ist, so kann die Unrechtmässigkeit des Beginnens und der Vollführung die Untertanen von der Verbindlichkeit, der neuen Ordnung der Dinge sich als gute Staatsbürger zu fügen, nicht befreien, und sie können sich nicht weigern, derjenigen Obrigkeit ehrlich zu gehorchen, die jetzt die Gewalt hat." *Works*, vol. v, p. 444.

P. 95. "Bürgerliche Freiheit ist der Zustand da niemand verbunden ist anders als dem was das Gesetz sagt zu gehorchen. Diese schränkt also die executive Gewalt ein auf die Bedingung des Gesetzes und kann ihr durch den Richter widerstehen. Dies will soviel sagen als: niemand kann durch einen einzelnen Spruch (der nicht Gesetz ist und aufs Allgemeine geht) gezwungen werden etwas zu tun oder etwas zu lassen." Reicke, F 13.

P. 96. "Ein jedes Glied des gemeinen Wesens hat gegen jedes andere Zwangsrechte, wovon nur das Oberhaupt desselben ausgenommen ist." *Works*, vol. i, p. 194.

P. 96. "Folglich ist jeder Knecht ein Mensch, der wie eine parasitische Pflanze nur auf andern Bürgern wurzelt." *Reicke F 21.*

P. 98. "Was ich nach Gesetzen der äusseren Freiheit in meine Gewalt bringe und will, es soll mein sein, das wird mein." *Works*, vol. v, p. 375.

P. 99. "Ueberdem lassen sich manche Beweise geben, dass das menschliche Geschlecht, im Ganzen, wirklich in unserm Zeitalter, in Vergleichung mit allen vorigen, ansehnlich zum selbst Menschlich-Besseren fortgerückt sei—and dass das Geschrei von der unaufhaltsam zunehmenden Verunartung derselben gerade daher kommt, dass, wenn es auf einer höheren Stufe der Moralität steht, es noch weiter vor sich sieht, und sein Urteil über das, was man ist, in Vergleichung mit dem was man sein sollte, . . . immer desto strenger wird." *Works*, vol. i, p. 216.

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